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記事  
SISHA'S JISHAS

公華 | 二部曲

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未來只剩下繼續失去這個選項。  
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# 復仇

御我  
著







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# Prologue: The Flower that Feeds on Flesh and Blood

Are you in search of a good assassin?

If so, you should look for “Left Eye.”

You say the name is strange? Ah, assassins do not use their real name. Left Eye is merely a code name.

Left Eye has a scar on his left eye, therefore he’s very recognizable. He only accepts money or rare poisons as his reward... Oh! He also accepts information on a certain person with black hair and red eyes. If you have information, he’ll help you kill anyone you want.

But you need to remember: do not try to fool him with false information. Trust me, you do not want to know what happened to the last person who lied to him.

\*\*\*

When did things become this way?

His hand was holding onto a sword etched with many complex designs. It was an extraordinary sword, one he completely couldn’t afford. Before, would he have desperately saved up money in order to obtain this sword? But at that moment, all he wanted to do was toss aside that blood-spattered, disgusting thing.

But he couldn’t throw it away, because he needed it to protect the people near him. The people...Black hair waved in a wild dance, making it impossible to discern the person’s face. At first glance, it appeared to be a black hole, one that devoured people. A pair of blood-red eyes could be seen inside the hole, watching the world...near him.

The enemy soldiers that surrounded them had already had their spirits broken, and many had turned to flee. There were a few soldiers that were still fighting valiantly, but soon, they met their end by the lethal vines. Or they were crushed flat into meat patties, or dragged underground, not leaving behind a trace of

their existence. Even the ones that had turned to run could not escape the vines that chased after them.

Their opponent was the Danya People. They were invaders, murderers of the people of his country. This was war. There was no need for him to feel guilty or pity them.

In his head, he was reciting all kinds of justifications, but it was clear... This wasn't war at all; it was a massacre.

"Owen, there's someone dressed elegantly in front of us, though he's a little far away. Should I kill him?"

Upon hearing those words, Owen felt a stab of pain in his heart. He turned to look at Gong Hua, and remembered the various instructions he had given the other: When you step onto a battleground, you need to kill everyone around us. You can't let anyone near, and if you see anyone holding bows and arrows, kill them immediately. The ones dressed especially magnificently are the ones you need to kill first...

Every single one of his instructions was kill, kill, and kill!

"Owen?"

Startled, Owen stopped letting his thoughts run wild. He looked up; the target truly was far away. There had to be at least a few thousand soldiers separating them. Although the distance was great, Owen could see that the figure was wearing a conspicuous, azure cloak. Even the beast the person was riding on was equipped with luxurious armor. The guards that surrounded him were even more imposing. It appeared that their target wasn't an ordinary soldier; he had to be some sort of dignitary.

If he was the one that was leading the troops, if they killed him, the enemy's army should fall apart by itself. Perhaps they could end this battle early.

With this, they would cause fewer deaths, right? But as he looked at the thousands of soldiers in front of him, Owen couldn't help but waver. If they had to cleave a path to reach their target, how many would they kill this time?

"Owen?"

Owen turned around. Gong Hua was staring at him with wide eyes, reeking of the stench of blood. Gong Hua's black hair, twined into an unruly mass and dancing about wildly, was soaked with the blood of countless soldiers. And that pair of blood red eyes; even their own soldiers were afraid to look into them. Even though Gong Hua was the one that helped them win their battles, the soldiers called her "Evil Spirit" in private.

Owen alone knew that only sincerity and pureness reflected in that pair of blood red eyes, although they now also carried a hint of grief. After experiencing the events in that small town, Gong Hua came to understand more things. But even when drenched in blood, Gong Hua remained the little girl who Mila described to be incapable of harming others.

Owen reached out and rubbed Gong Hua's head. It was an incongruous action, one that wouldn't normally appear on a battlefield. To the two of them, however, it was the most natural occurrence. Even if Gong Hua was standing motionless, he could still control the vines. Plus, Owen's only command was to stay beside Gong Hua. On the battleground, they often stood like this while chatting, trying to ignore the slaughter that was occurring around them.

When Owen lifted his hand from Gong Hua's head, it was dyed red with blood. He stared at his palm, feeling as if he was only attempting to deceive himself. So what if they killed a few thousands more? They had already caused many deaths.

Owen nodded and said, "Yes, we'll go kill him."

Gong Hua obediently nodded in response. Vines started making a path for the two of them, a path carpeted in blood.

Huge vines sprang from the ground, charging violently into the wall of soldiers. They had no way of dodging the vines, much less scream before they were turned into puddles of blood.

To prevent their target from running away, Owen specially instructed Gong Hua to let the vines rampage wildly instead of aiming straight ahead. But because of this, the death toll grew higher and higher.

Their pace was quite slow. As they walked, Owen focused on the man in the azure cloak. Had the man decided to retreat?

Although Gong Hua's ability to manipulate plants was strong, there was a limit to how far he could send them. The farther the vines got, the weaker they became. If they passed a certain distance, he would lose his control over them. So the two could only move forward at a slow pace. Owen prayed that their target wouldn't see through the situation and decide to escape.

The beasts the Danya People rode had astonishing speed. Even Gong Hua's vines had trouble keeping up with those beasts. If the man decided to leave, there was no way they could catch up.

Contrary to Owen's expectations, however, not only did the man in the azure-cloak not escape, he directed his beast in their direction and started galloping towards them.

As the distance between the two parties shortened, Owen finally made out their target's appearance. The man had white hair shot through with streaks of blue, which surprised Owen. During this whole war, the Danya People he had seen typically had five different colors in their hair—white, blue, gold, red, and black. Even if someone didn't have all five colors, they had at least three or four. It was rare to see someone from the Danya tribe with only two different colors in their hair. It seemed like the man truly wasn't of ordinary status.

The man in the azure cloak suddenly roared in the human language, "You will not massacre my people any longer!"

At the same time, he pressed closer towards Owen and Gong Hua. The guards that surrounded the man shouted in alarm. They moved in front of him, obstructing his way, and yelled in worried voices. Although Owen didn't understand the language of the Danya People, he could guess that the guards were trying to persuade their master to flee.

But the man riding the beast would not listen. Instead, he reached to the side of his beast and pulled out a massive sword. To a human, the size of that sword was inconceivable. Even for a two meter Danya, it was still enormous. It had to be the same size as a fully-grown human.

The man jumped down from the back of his beast, and roared at the guards surrounding him. Even though the guards were concerned, it appeared that the man's words carried weight. The guards had reluctant expressions on their faces,



but they moved to the side, making a path for their master.

Carrying the giant sword on his shoulders, the man in the azure cloak walked towards Owen and Gong Hua. His face was already full of anger, but as he walked across the ground covered in blood and flesh, his expression became even more terrifying. Adding on his two meter sturdy physique, and the giant sword on his shoulders, he truly appeared to be invincible. The imposing aura he exuded was awe-inspiring.

He stopped ten steps away from Owen and Gong Hua, and bellowed in the human language, “I am Indigo of the White Army! Monster, come forth and accept your death!”

Hearing those words, Gong Hua couldn’t help but hide behind Owen, even unconsciously grasping onto the other’s clothes. He was terrified. The huge man’s expression was like... was like the one Cedric had on before!

After the man had finished speaking, Gong Hua couldn’t resist asking quietly, “Owen, what’s a monster?”

Owen’s expression darkened when he heard the question. He didn’t want to explain, but even if he didn’t, Gong Hua could guess at the meaning. The child was getting to know the ways of the world better and better although Owen preferred him to be ignorant.

If Gong Hua was ignorant, then he wouldn’t feel guilty when he killed someone and after he killed someone, he wouldn’t feel sorrow.

Unfortunately, after the events of the small town and Mila’s death, Gong Hua came to understand many things. He became quieter by the day, grief could be seen in his expressions, and smiles had stopped appearing on his face. The one thing that hadn’t changed was that he was as well-behaved as ever... He always obediently slaughtered people.

Owen felt another stab of pain in his heart. He turned towards the two meter Danya and snarled, “You people are the cause of this war! Do you think your hands are clean? The monsters are you people!”

Indigo let out a loud snort, and sternly replied, “War is commonplace between two opposing countries! As a soldier, I have no complaints dying in battle.

However, dying in battle does not mean being massacred by that monster!”

Although Owen said nothing in response, he secretly agreed with the other’s words. He was a soldier himself. If the situation was reversed, and there was an unimaginably formidable enemy killing their own soldiers like plucking weeds from a garden, he might be even more resentful or fearful. This Danya, who was courageous enough to walk up to Gong Hua and curse at him, was truly impressive. Unfortunately...

“Gong Hua, kill him.”

Gong Hua was still hiding behind Owen, but that didn’t prevent him from controlling the vines. A vine the width of a human shot towards Indigo. The man leapt aside and swung his huge sword, cutting it into two. He then swiftly dashed forward, slicing again at the vines. Gong Hua stared in surprise. Up until now, he hadn’t met anyone from the Danya Tribe who was able to retaliate.

Seeing that Gong Hua was startled, Indigo charged forward; he wasn’t about to waste the rare opportunity he was given. His attack speed was astonishing. Fortunately, Owen was well prepared. He raised his sword to block the other’s strike. He was holding a one-handed sword, and reason dictated that he shouldn’t be able to face a two-handed sword head on as his sword would certainly break into two. But the sword he was holding wasn’t ordinary. Although Owen’s arm was numb from the force of Indigo’s strike, his sword was completely unscratched.

It appeared that Indigo didn’t plan on getting into a long fight with Owen. Every move he made was a straightforward slash towards the head or waist. The power of his fearsome sword was extraordinary; it raised powerful winds every time Indigo hacked down. What was even more surprising was that his enormous two-handed sword had the speed of a one-handed sword!

Owen did not have any strength to counterattack. All he could manage was sidestepping and ducking to avoid the other’s swings. Occasionally, he had the chance to strike back, but he did not manage to injure Indigo. On the other hand, he had already been grazed by the huge sword numerous times, leaving several cuts on his body.

Seeing Owen injured, Gong Hua yelled out in alarm, but Owen didn’t hear him.

Besides the thudding of his heart, which was as loud as drums, Owen couldn't hear anything else. Likewise, the only thing he could see was his opponent.

"Step aside!" Indigo furiously snarled.

Luckily, Owen was strong enough to keep the other interested. If he was just a bit weaker, Indigo would certainly have ignored him and turned to attack Gong Hua instead. If he was just a bit stronger, then Indigo would truly see him as a worthwhile opponent.

As Indigo was currently matched up with Owen, the guard of the black-haired monster, he felt he had to defeat him first before he had the right to go after the one standing behind him.

But both sides were not what they seemed. Indigo felt only irritation at this.

*He's so powerful that he could defeat me in just a few strikes.* However, Owen wasn't scared. Instead, he felt carefree and unrestrained. Whenever he stepped onto the battlefield, he had to lead Gong Hua around to slaughter people. Enemy and friend alike looked at the two of them as if they were monsters. The atmosphere was simply too oppressive!

"I know I'm not the one you want to fight, but why don't you stick around and play with me for a bit?" Owen cracked a smile. Then, he turned and shouted, "Gong Hua, don't interfere! Go take care of the other soldiers!"

"B-but, Owen..." Gong Hua didn't know what to do. He wanted to obey Owen's command, but that giant two-handed sword terrified him. He feared that if Owen didn't dodge in time, he would be split into two... just like Mila.

Owen turned his head and fiercely glared at Gong Hua. He growled, "Go, now!"

Gong Hua was startled, and took a few steps backwards. But he didn't obediently leave like he was told, though he knew Owen would definitely be unhappy. In any case, it wasn't the first time Owen yelled or got angry at him. Ever since they were on the run, Owen had been unhappy.

Standing on the side, Indigo saw everything. He had a strange feeling in his heart, especially upon seeing Gong Hua's cowering manner. He didn't appear like a heartless slaughterer who had killed countless people on the battlefield.



Instead, he was like... a child?

Indigo hesitated for a moment and looked around at the situation. Although the battlegrounds were chaotic, neither Danya nor humans dared to approach them. A circle of empty land surrounded the three of them. It was a spectacle rarely seen on the battlefield.

“Alright, then let me have a battle with you!”

Hearing this, no one would attempt to offer assistance to the two men. After putting his thoughts in order, Indigo decided to not beat around the bush, and straightforwardly said, “Let’s battle.” In any case, for him, defeating Owen wouldn’t take much time. Instead of wasting his breath, it would be better to quickly defeat his opponent.

When he heard Indigo’s declaration, Owen’s eyes immediately brightened. He growled and let out a “Good.” He then immediately raised his sword and attacked. His sword was light, allowing for agile movements. Although Owen’s strength couldn’t compare to Indigo’s, with his sword, he could at least parry a few strikes before his defeat.

Indigo was surprised. Before, whenever his opponent carried a flimsy, one-handed sword, it would break after enduring a few blocks. Right now, even though their swords had already clashed more than ten times, Owen’s sword was completely undamaged; there was not the slightest chip on the blade. He couldn’t resist praising, “That’s a good sword! Does it have a name?”

Of course, Owen knew he had a good sword in his hands. After all, it was a sword he got from Nightclaw! The price he paid for it was huge; Gong Hua had been badly injured that time...

“You’re facing me, yet you can afford to be distracted?” Indigo growled.

Owen was startled out of his reverie. He saw the giant sword aimed at his head, which brought forth a huge gush of wind. He had no way of blocking it in time, so he quickly stepped back. But not even a half-step later, the huge sword was already above his head.

“Owen!” Gong Hua yelled in fear.

When the sword struck the earth, it let out an earsplitting sound. Even on the

raucous battlefield, the sound could be heard, making people's hearts tremble in fear. Upon closer inspection, Owen saw that the force of the sword had split the ground.

Owen had fallen onto the ground. He was still in one piece, but he didn't completely dodge the blow. The huge sword had grazed his shoulder, which was dripping with blood. His own sword had also been knocked away.

After that one blow, Owen knew he had been defeated. The difference between their strength was too great. There was no reason for them to prolong the fight. How unfortunate...

Owen slowly stood up, and walked over to where his sword had fallen. The whole time, Indigo did not make a move to attack him. He truly was a man of honor. Owen looked hard at the other. Although the latter was a Danya, Owen sincerely admired him. Be it courage or fighting skills, Indigo excelled in all of them!

He picked up his sword, and suddenly an idea came to him. Owen turned around and replied to the question Indigo had asked earlier, "This sword is called Nightclaw!"

"Nightclaw? That's a good name." Regrettably, the owner didn't match up to it, but Indigo didn't say the last sentence out loud. Even if he had already defeated Owen, he did not want to humiliate the man.

"Gong Hua, do it." Although he was unwilling, Owen gave the command. No matter how admirable Indigo was, he was still the enemy. After receiving permission, numerous huge vines exploded out from the ground. Gong Hua planned on killing Indigo immediately, lest Owen wanted to battle by himself again. If he got injured yet again, he would surely die!

Indigo brandished his sword, a single slash of it cut apart dozens of vines, but there were simply too many. Even if he slashed furiously, like he was holding a light sword, he could not clear the vines. Plus, the vines regrew even after they were cut; there was no way they could be cleared!

Gradually, Indigo's hands and legs became entwined with numerous small vines. He paid them no attention, as countless other dangerous vines were currently attacking him.

At that moment, Indigo's guards abandoned their posts, disobeying their master's previous command. They rushed forward to rescue their lord, but their path was immediately blocked by a huge vine. They roared in rage, and furiously hacked at it. But they were too slow: the small vines had already wrapped Indigo in a tight cocoon. He couldn't even brandish his sword.

Seeing that Indigo was about to be pierced by dozens of vines, a person gracefully leapt over the vine that was obstructing the guards' path. He stood in front of Indigo, shielding him.

The person was holding a sword, and was waving it about incredibly quickly, turning the blade into an indistinguishable blur. What could be seen were only flashes of silver. Afterwards, most of the vines that encased Indigo fell onto the ground, slashed to pieces.

Though he saw what had happened, Gong Hua wasn't too worried. The reason he used the small vines to attack was because most Danya carried heavy two-handed weapons. Those kinds of weapons were good in handling single, strong opponents. However, they weren't as capable when facing countless numbers of nimble small vines. The person that had jumped out to protect Indigo looked the complete opposite of a regular Danya. His stature was small, and his weapon was a one-handed sword. He also appeared to be extremely agile. But since he was agile, his strength couldn't amount to much.

The man opened his mouth, as if he had something to say. But the vines' attacks were swift and fierce; he had no time to finish his words, or make sure his words were clear. His broken sentences were no different from frenzied shouts.

Gong Hua switched to using huge vines to deal with his new opponent. As expected, the man's flimsy sword couldn't cut apart the huge vine. In vain, he slashed at it, but was sent flying with a single attack. He slammed against Indigo, and coughed up blood from the impact.

Indigo let out a heart-wrenching roar. The veins in his face and arms bulged out, and he struggled frenziedly against the remaining vines that bound him. Even as they tore open his skin and dug into his flesh, he prevailed stubbornly, ripping apart the vines on his hands by strength alone. He then used his sword



and slashed through the rest.

After he broke free, Indigo tossed aside his sword. He pulled the injured guard into his arms, letting the other rest against him. He inspected the guard's wounds, but he only saw a badly mangled chest. Indigo felt a heavy stab in his heart, and he cried in panic, "Aqua-Aquamarine!"

The person in his arms struggled to take off his helmet, revealing a delicate and beautiful face, along with a head of clear blue hair... He was actually a woman!

Obviously, she was not of the Danya tribe, who were built strong and large. Her face was thin, and her neck was slender. After losing so much blood, she looked even frailer.

When Gong Hua glanced upon her face, he froze in shock.

The woman's face was also filled with surprise. Her chest was a bloody mess, and she was suffering from the pain of her wound, but the expression on her face was far more surprised than in pain.

Although Indigo was asking if she was alright nonstop, her eyes were fixed solely on Gong Hua. It appeared she had something to say. But every time she opened her mouth, she would choke on her own blood and start coughing, so much that she almost fainted.

"Aquamarine!" Indigo hurriedly patted her on the back, his hands extremely gentle. But he had no way of making her comfortable. The big and strong Danya was so anxious his voice was starting to get choked up.

"Indi-Indigo," Aquamarine said with difficulty. "Look after..."

Indigo was taken aback, and then he quickly asked, "What?"

Aquamarine took a ragged breath. The air she was taking in was far less than she was losing, but she was determined to finish her words.

"...Look, look after our Flower!"

"Flower?" Indigo didn't understand. Aquamarine suddenly sucked in a breath, her face deathly pale, and lips purple. Indigo immediately said in distress, "Don't speak anymore, rest! I'm going to bring you to a healer!" He then turned and shouted at his guards in the Danya language.

Twenty or so guards rushed forward. They stacked their shields on top one another's, and positioned themselves around Indigo in a protective wall. The wall of shields blocked Gong Hua's line of sight. He could no longer see the injured woman. He worriedly shouted, "Move, I can't see!"

He shouted again and again, but those guards paid him no attention. In reality, most of them didn't understand the human language. So they were even more vigilant towards Gong Hua.

He waved his hand, and small vines sprouted from the ground around the guards' feet. The vines wrapped around their ankles, but as they were all wearing armor, they did not notice the vines. All of their attention was fixed on Gong Hua; they did not have any to spare for the vines beside their feet.

*Pull them aside.* Just when Gong Hua was about to command the vines, a piercing roar sounded behind the wall of shields.

"Aquamarine!"

When he heard the roar, Gong Hua's hands and feet went cold. Heaviness weighed down his heart, making it almost impossible for him to breathe. By then, he had already understood what kind of situation a person would make a sound like that...

"Gong Hua, kill that Danya. His rank should be very high. If you kill him, we can end this battle." Resisting the pain from his shoulder, Owen gave the order. But when he finished speaking, he did not see any vines moving. Puzzled, he turned to look at the other and asked, "Gong Hua, why aren't you moving?"

An uncontrollable shaking had overtaken Gong Hua's body. For a long time, he couldn't speak a word.

"Gong Hua?" Seeing this, Owen couldn't help but feel worried. He had rarely seen Gong Hua act this scared. The most recent time was when... he first massacred the Danya People.

Gong Hua raised his head, and said, "Owen, sh-she's... I killed, killed... I killed a Leaf!"

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: PiKairi, Natas



# Chapter 1: Racing Flames... The Day I Dived into Those Flames

You ran away! After taking everything from me, you actually dared to run away!

*Gong Hua!*

No, I can't be impatient. I can't win against Gong Hua right now, not at all. I have to become strong!

A spiritmancer, a spirit charmer, or a spirit binder... No! I obviously don't have any other options.

Gong Hua, don't you agree?

Oh right, I had completely forgotten. You aren't even human, so how it can it even be called killing a person?

*Hahahaha...*

—Cas

"The Danji Yate. White reigns supreme in their tribe. The four colors in succession are vermillion, indigo, gold, and black."

West raised an eyebrow when he saw his tent flap open. He then looked at the young man who entered, the latter making himself comfortable in the tent.

The youth smiled and said, "What kind of expression is that? What I've just told you is the latest news from the reconnaissance team! I came to report to you right after I had reported to Alfven Xi Jiang."

"I have no complaints about your report, but I do have a complaint about you. If I'm not mistaken, this is my tent, and the wine glass you're holding is also mine! Moreover, what you're drinking smells like the Xialan wine from my collection!"

At that moment, the young man stood up. He downed the wine in his glass, and carefully sat the glass aside. He then saluted West and said, "Commander, I have something to report!"

West replied in an unhappy voice, "Well, aren't you polite. Speak, Yehv. What

is it?”

Yehv gave a smile, and said, “About what I’ve said earlier, the Danji Yate is what is commonly known as Danya. The king of Danya is referred to as ‘White.’ It is said that he has a head of completely white hair, which does not bode well for us. White serves as the base color for all Danyas’ hairs. On top of that, they can have a mixture of red, blue, gold, and black in their hair. They can range from having either one or all four of those colors. Danyas with fewer colors in their hair are more powerful. So White’s strength is not to be underestimated. Of course, we don’t know exactly how strong he is.”

West nodded at the explanation and asked, “Then what do you mean by ‘The four colors in succession are vermillion, indigo, gold, and black?’ ”

“Danya is divided into four great families, which are the Zhu, Dian, Jin, and Xuan. Each of the four families would send someone out to serve directly under White, becoming a ‘Color’ when they assume their post. For example, someone from the Zhu family would just be called Vermillion.”

West understood, and commented, “So these Colors are similar to the Warlords of our own country. Our own four Warlords each command one of the four great clans...”

Yehv shook his head and said, “No, for the most part, the Colors are the children of the leaders of the four families. Normally, the Color is the most capable and talented child in the family. If a more talented child appears, however, then the Color could be changed by White. Also, only Colors who have served under White are able to succeed their family in the future.”

“That is quite baffling. If it’s like that, then is the social status of a Color higher than that of the family leader?” West asked puzzledly after hearing Yehv’s explanation.

“I haven’t investigated that yet,” Yehv replied, a hint of apology in his voice. “Alfven Xi Jiang only asked me to look into Danya’s military matters. Although I’ve researched a bit of their country’s internal affairs, it’s not enough for me to grasp a good understanding of them.”

“It doesn’t matter. We don’t have time to worry about another country’s internal affairs anyways.” West then continued somewhat gloomily, “It has been

three months since the Danyas broke through the Zangxia Gates. Since then, they've attacked and occupied Zhong Zhen, our country's easternmost town. They've even crossed over the Eastern River without difficulty, and now they've pushed us to Dong Zhen! The most important thing for us to do right now is to hold on to Chakou City. If we lose the battle here at Chakou and let them pass over the Cha River, we would lose our last line of defense. The rich and prosperous Old Zhan Plains would be like a fat sheep waiting for the slaughter."

Yehv nodded in response and said, "To the north of Chakou, we have the Southern Gulf Mountains. And to the south, we have the Linhai Marshes. Plus, we have rivers acting as natural moats around the city on both sides. Chakou is easy to defend and hard to attack. However, as the city is quite some distance away from the Zangxia Gates, we have not built a military fort here. The strength of the city walls can't compare to that of the Zangxia Gates."

Upon those words, West growled furiously. "That bastard who abandoned the Zangxia Gates deserves to have his head chopped off, a hundred times!"

"The person you're angry at is a zong jiang, and your superior at that." Yehv lifted an eyebrow. He then smiled and said, "Although, that person probably isn't a zong jiang anymore; the result of his court-martial will most likely be worse than death. Despite that, you probably have to thank him."

West stared in surprise. He didn't understand what Yehv meant by those words.

"Our Alfven Xi Jiang now has one fewer zong jiang under his command, which means that the spiritmancer regiment Racing Flame's Left Division is currently lacking someone to command them. According to what I've heard, you have a pretty good chance of rising two ranks and directly becoming the zong jiang of the Left Division."

West's heart thumped when he heard Yehv's words, but he was still somewhat unconvinced. "Don't joke around, I'm only a zong xiao. How can I skip xi xiao and directly become a zong jiang? It's against the law."

"Things are different when we are at war. Not to mention, Alfven Xi Jiang has already especially summoned you to join military conferences, and more than once at that. Am I right? Only officials ranked as xi xiao and above can attend

those meetings.” Yehv paused and smiled mysteriously. “You might just be the one to succeed the entire Racing Flame regiment in the future.”

Faced with Yehv’s words, West’s heart couldn’t help but race in excitement. His ultimate dream was to command the Racing Flame regiment, but he knew he had something far more important to do at that moment. He straightened his state of mind and lashed out at the other. “Stop with your nonsense. If we lose this battle, we’d all probably end up dead in Chakou. There’s no point in talking about succeeding the Racing Flame right now!”

Hearing that, Yehv’s expression became serious. He replied, “You’re right. This will be a difficult battle. After we lost the Zangxia Gates, the troops’ morale has been sinking. In contrast, the Danyas are in high spirits, attacking and breaking our defenses with unstoppable force. We are at a severe disadvantage. It doesn’t matter if Chakou’s city walls are weak. Soldiers lacking morale can’t even guard a small treasury!”

At those words, worry appeared on the faces of both men. West muttered, “We need a victory to boost our troops’ morale.”

Yehv smiled bitterly. “Looking at the present situation, that would be very difficult. The most important thing right now is to defend Chakou. To steal a victory while doing that would not be simple.”

“Right. If we can defend it until the end, it would be our victory.” West couldn’t help but feel a little dejected, though he then pulled himself together and asked, “How are the plans for defending the city coming along?”

Yehv understood what West was really trying to ask and smiled faintly. “The loss at the Zangxia Gates has crippled the Left Division, reducing it to half its original size. So the main forces that will be defending the city are the Central and Right Divisions.”

West abruptly stood up and yelled, “Even if the Left Division has been reduced to half its size, it still has around ten thousand soldiers capable of fighting. Even if we are down to the last soldier, we can’t lose Chakou to the Danyas! Don’t tell me Alfven Xi Jiang hasn’t realized this?”

“Indeed, a majority of the high-ranking officers have not realized the importance of this battle,” Yehv replied honestly. “Our troops have been

repeatedly pushed back during this whole war. Our casualty ranges around twenty-thousand soldiers, which includes around three thousand spiritmancers and two hundred spirit charmers. Judging from those numbers, it can be said that our losses have been disastrous so far. But beside our Racing Flame regiment, our country also has the Xialan spiritmancer regiment which is currently protecting the Old Zhan Plains. Moreover, Qi Feng has the spiritmancer regiment Qi Sheng, which is reputed to be the largest regiment in the country. Due to that, the officials aren't too worried."

West frowned and said, "The Danyas are stronger than what we've expected. If we let them into the Old Zhan Plains, our country would suffer extremely heavy casualties."

"To the superior officers, the Danyas are merely barbarians. They don't even have spiritmancers or spirit charmers. What is there to fear?"

"Nonsense!" West yelled, almost leaping out of his seat in anger. "The average height of a Danya male is two meters! Plus, they all possess extraordinary strength. Not to mention, Danya's battles techniques are far more complex and developed than our own. An average soldier, no, even a spiritmancer wouldn't be able to defeat one of them!"

"Alfven Xi Jiang understands at least that. He's not an incompetent commander." Yehv then assured, "The zong jiang of the Left Division has been court-martialed. The Left Division is crippled and only has half its soldiers left. It wouldn't be strange for them to be left alone and ignored. However, that sort of situation wouldn't last long. Alfven Xi Jiang would never do something as incompetent as not putting ten-thousand capable soldiers to use."

Hearing those words, West's expression improved slightly.

"You shouldn't worry too much. You're only a zong xiao. Even if you worry, you can't change the current situation. Just be patient and wait. Alfven Xi Jiang truly looks favorably upon you. In my opinion, the Left Division will be yours sooner or later."

West's furrowed brow relaxed at Yehv's reply. He patted the other's shoulders and said, "You've worked hard. Thanks for the trouble. I'm sorry you had to go and spy in another division. You even had to forge a good relationship with



Alfven Xi Jiang. If it weren't for you, I would never have been able to obtain such valuable information with my rank as zong xiao."

"It's simply my duty." Yehv smiled in response. "Besides, all you would lose is information if I'm not here. If you weren't here, then I would certainly be in a more miserable state. Even if I don't starve to death in some forgotten alley, I would certainly be reduced to stealing to survive."

At those words, West couldn't help but feel grateful to his unruly younger self. When he was young, he had sneaked out to play once and got his pockets picked by a thief. Losing his wallet wasn't anything big, but his important family badge was also in his wallet. The scolding he had received at that time was horrific to recall. After tracking the thief, he found that it was a beggar he had passed by before on the streets. The important thing was that the beggar was only six years old.

He became a laughingstock after everyone found out that his pockets had been picked by a six-year-old child. So under the guise of wanting an attendant, he asked his father to bring the little beggar to him. But what kind of an attendant could a six-year-old possibly become? All West had wanted to do was teach the little beggar a lesson.

But contrary to his expectations, when his fifteen year old self stared down at the six-year-old child, he found that he didn't have the heart to raise his hand. Plus, the child always addressed him with "Big Brother this" and "Big Brother that." In the end, he even sent the child to be properly trained as a spiritmancer. Unknowingly, the child had somehow already grown to be this big.

Looking at Yehv, West couldn't help but sigh. Then he remembered he was only thirty years old. How could he already be reminiscing about the past?

"You're just like my father. Providing you with information isn't anything big," Yehv said in an appreciative voice.

"It's 'Big Brother!'" West almost coughed up blood when he heard the word "father."

Yehv chuckled. "Alright, Big Brother it is—"

Yehv stopped halfway through his sentence and turned towards the tent flap.

West followed and turned in the same direction. At that moment, a voice yelled out “Report” outside the tent.

West wrinkled his brow and called back, “Speak!”

“Zong Xiao, someone’s here to see you. His name is Zhan · Owen · Paladin. He says he’s your cousin.”

West was surprised and murmured, “Owen? What is he doing here?”

Owen was a spiritmancer of great physical strength and would be of great help in the war. However, West didn’t want him here. Even though Chakou was easy to guard and hard to attack, the Danyas were attacking with relentless force. Guarding Chakou would not be an easy task. Even if they did manage hold their position, the battleground would probably turn into a river of blood in the process.

The Paladin clan was already spread thin. In the previous battle, several young members of the family had already died. If it continued like this, then they would all certainly die off.

Looking at West’s expression, Yehv immediately knew what the other was thinking. He quickly said, “To be able to climb to the rank of xi jiang, help from the family is absolutely essential. Although the situation is dangerous at the moment, it is exactly this sort of situation in which soldiers can climb ranks the fastest. The more members of the family join the army, the faster they can rise in position. This will be of help to you in the future.”

“They’ll probably die faster than they can rise in rank...” West murmured to himself. Then he said out loud, “Alright, I understand. You can take your leave now. You’re the xi wei of the Central Division’s reconnaissance team. If someone sees you in the Left Division’s barracks, it’ll be troublesome for both of us. You can meet Owen after I have a talk with him and explain the situation.”

“Yes.”

Yehv nodded and draped the long coat especially worn by scouts across his shoulders. Even more strangely, he put on a half-face mask. Disguise complete, he stepped out of the tent.

The guards standing outside weren’t surprised. They were trusted confidants

especially picked out by West himself. They knew very well who the masked man was.

The Yehv without a mask was the xi wei who commanded the reconnaissance team of Racing Flame's Central Division. He was just a little over twenty years old. Once the mask was on though, Yehv became West's guard, a position he'd held ever since he was young. His face had been disfigured by a fire, thus he wore a mask all yearlong. He was the same age as West, a little past thirty.

West watched as Yehv left the tent. He couldn't help but be grateful that he hadn't made the decision to bring Yehv to the Left Division. If he hadn't secretly sent Yehv to the Central Division, he wouldn't be able to gather to all these top secret intelligence today. A war without secret intelligence was like a roadside without a brawl.

The tent flap was lifted once again and West turned his attention back in its direction. What he saw next made him pause in shock.

Owen walked in while holding a girl's hand. Both of their clothes were battered and torn. The girl's black hair was even more disorderly, the strands tangled in a gigantic mess. If it wasn't for the fact that she was wearing a skirt, then it'd be hard to tell if she was male or female.

*What kind of situation is this?* West was surprised and suspicious at the same time. If it hadn't been Owen, whom he had known since childhood, standing before him, then he certainly would've called the guards in to throw the two out.

"You..." West opened his mouth, but he didn't know where to start asking his questions. He thought for a bit and decided to start with the most practical one—who was the girl standing beside Owen?

"Who is this girl?"

The question made Owen's body stiffen. The girl also moved and hid behind Owen.

"West-Ge, I've been listed as a wanted criminal." Owen ignored the question West had tossed at him.

"What?" West's eyes widened in disbelief. He then dismissed his suspicions and asked, "Did you desert the army?"

If Owen was a deserter, then West could solve it by using his position and the influence of the Paladin clan. It wouldn't amount to much of a problem. Besides, Owen even personally came to the battlegrounds. The matter should pass if he said that Owen was worried for his safety and deserted his team to come here and cheer on the army.

Owen shook his head and was silent for a moment. He then pushed the girl hiding behind him to the front. "This is Gong Hua. She has committed a terrible crime, but it wasn't her intention! To protect her, I took her and escaped. I ended up killing my team's spirit charmer in the process."

West frowned upon hearing Owen's explanation. *He killed a spirit charmer?* Suddenly, West felt somewhat regretful that he had let Yehv leave earlier. If they had one more person, then they could discuss a way of solving the matter. He could even directly order Yehv to go and destroy the evidence.

On the other hand, West wasn't too concerned about the girl called Gong Hua who had committed a terrible crime. What kind of crime could a thin and weak girl like her commit? The most she could have done was kill a person.

West's mind was in complete chaos, but he still wanted to get a clear grasp of the situation. He asked, motioning towards Gong Hua, "Is she the girl you've talked about before in your letters? The one you wanted to marry?"

To be honest, West wasn't very satisfied with the girl Owen had chosen. She looked even...dirtier and messier than Yehv had been when he was a beggar. How could a normal girl let herself become like this?

Upon hearing West's question, Owen looked as if he had been dealt a heavy blow. His expression caved and he said in a muffled voice, "No, that girl was called Mila. She died..."

"Died?" West was alarmed, and then he noticed Owen's face.

As the two's attire were too shocking, West had failed to get a good look at their faces. But now he took in Owen's sunken cheeks, his cloudy, bloodshot eyes, and the dark circles underneath. The lower half of Owen's face was even covered with stubble.

*Exactly what did he experience to become like this?*

“The spirit charmer who was pursuing Gong Hua killed Mila. So I killed him.” Owen only offered a simple explanation.

West didn’t hear Owen and instead worriedly asked, “How long has it been since you’ve gotten a good night’s sleep?”

Owen stared blankly at West; he didn’t know how to answer the sudden question.

“Do you have soldiers following you?” West inquired closely.

Owen shook his head. They had traveled the whole way by vines, which were extremely fast. Even though people could recognize them as wanted criminals by the marks the vines left behind, they had no plausible way of catching up.

West felt reassured by Owen’s response. He patted his cousin’s shoulder. “Why don’t you go sleep first? Get a good night’s rest. We can discuss this afterwards.”

Owen nodded in agreement at West’s suggestion.

West glanced at Gong Hua and said, “That girl can sleep at the army personnel’s quarters.”

At West’s words, Gong Hua grabbed Owen with both hands and held on tightly. Owen shook his head and said, “It will be best that she sleeps with me.”

West was surprised and hesitatingly said, “That wouldn’t be very appropriate... She’s still a girl after all. Oh! Don’t tell me you guys have already...”

Owen was stumped and then understood what West was asking. He said unhappily, “Exactly what are you thinking? She won’t leave my side, so we can only do it like this. I will let her have the bed, while I will sleep on the ground.”

West still felt the arrangement was inappropriate but decided not to linger on such a small problem. He wasted no time and immediately called for people to bring them to an empty tent. He himself had to quickly go and survey the city walls of Chakou to determine how strong they were.

“Thanks, Ge,” Owen said.

West patted his cousin’s shoulder and responded, “Hey we’re brothers. What do you need to thank me for?”



Owen nodded and turned to leave with the soldier who was going to lead the way to their tent.

West followed Owen's back with his eyes, and he was astonished by what he saw. In his impression, Owen had always been a man who exuded power and vigor even when he walked. Now, Owen appeared like an old man who was past his prime. His back was hunched, and he dragged his steps as he walked. The sight of his back was one belonging to a completely beaten and exhausted man.

"Exactly what did he experience?"

West was perplexed even after giving the question some thought. Even if Owen had killed someone, he shouldn't have been reduced to such a state. As soldiers, could the amount of blood on their hands be called small?

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"Owen, Mila said we have to leave this country. This place isn't where we should—"

"Be quiet!" Owen suddenly growled out. The soldier walking ahead of them was startled. He turned his head to look back at Owen, giving the latter a strange look.

Owen managed to pull a smile and explained, "The child is being noisy. I'm just disciplining her."

The soldier shifted his eyes to look at Gong Hua's direction. He didn't understand why a girl would come to this sort of place. He was even more alarmed at her wild and untidy appearance. However, he didn't dare to question his superior's commands. He would follow his orders to bring them to an open tent and leave afterwards.

When they reached the tent, Owen immediately sat down. He was exhausted, and the only thing he wanted to do at that moment was sleep.

"Owen, we have to leave this country," Gong Hua timidly probed the other.

Owen's anger boiled over and he exploded. He roared at Gong Hua, "Leave? How can we leave! I don't have anything abroad, how would I live in another country?"

Gong Hua couldn't understand Owen's point. Even in Zhan Yan, he didn't have anything. No matter where he went, all he had was Owen. It would be just the same in any other country, but only if Owen agreed to leave with him.

Gong Hua bowed his head, as if he didn't dare to speak anymore. Seeing that, Owen couldn't help but feel annoyed at his own irritation. He was on edge after days of being on the run. He truly had no plausible way of calming down at the moment.

"Gong Hua, you only need water to survive. I'm not the same. I need to eat, I need a place to live, and when it gets cold I need to wear thicker clothes."

Of course, there were more reasons as to why he didn't want to leave. In Zhan Yan, he had a family and a clan. Moreover, Zhan Yan was currently fighting a war. As a soldier, abandoning his clan and escaping to another country was unthinkable. But these weren't things he needed to explain to Gong Hua, as she wouldn't understand in the first place. All she did was stubbornly cling to the promise she had made to Mila.

"But Mila said we have to leave this country—"

That sentence again. Irritated, Owen waved his hand in dismissal and cut in. "Enough, go sleep on the bed. I have to sleep too. Be quiet for a bit, don't be noisy."

Gong Hua obediently lay down on the bed, but sleep wouldn't come to him. For a long while, he stared blankly at the ceiling of the tent. Then, his eyes suddenly widened. A spark of fire had appeared on the ceiling!

Gong Hua didn't know what to do. He turned his head to look at Owen, who was lying on the floor. Owen's eyes were shut tight, and he was even snoring. He looked like he was in a very deep sleep.

Although Gong Hua wanted to warn Owen of the situation, he remembered that Owen had told him to keep quiet. Gong Hua hesitated, and then summoned vines to support the ceiling. Even if the whole tent burned down to the ground, he and Owen would remain unhurt. He then continued staring blankly into space, only this time in Owen's direction.

It was becoming increasingly noisy outside. Perhaps Owen truly was tired, as

he was still asleep and showed no signs of waking anytime soon.

Gong Hua didn't mind. He listened to the racket outside while looking at Owen.

"Owen! Owen!"

Hearing his name, Owen jumped up. He immediately noticed the vines that were encircling the insides of the tent. However, he wasn't all that surprised. When they had been on the run, Gong Hua would surround the two of them in layers of vines whenever she felt the tiniest bit of danger.

Owen's mind was hazy with sleep. He couldn't figure out what was happening. Outside the tent, someone continued to call his name.

Owen recognized the voice and exclaimed loudly, "West-Ge?" He then turned to yell at Gong Hua, "Get rid of the vines, quickly!"

Gong Hua obediently did as he was told. He moved the vines back, but instead of sending them away, he let them rest on the ground, ready to move at any given time.

Just when Owen was about to step out, West rushed into the tent. He slammed into Owen, and the two crashed into the ground. Numerous shadows then flew into the tent, piercing the earth where they fell. They were arrows, the feathered ends still swinging from their force. If West and Owen hadn't fallen, they'd probably have several arrows sticking out their backs.

But that was only the first wave. More arrows immediately followed the first into the tent, coming in twos and threes. Although the number of incoming arrows was small, the two men on the ground had no way of dodging them. An arrow struck Owen's leg, eliciting a muffled grunt from the man.

"Owen!" Gong Hua screamed.

West raised his head. He had originally wanted to stand up and help; instead he was met with a sight he would never forget for the rest of his life.

The girl's black hair waved about in a wild dance, as if it had a life of its own. Vines exploded out from the ground, lifting off the tent. The darkness was replaced with a sea of green, and then...a red that filled the skies.

"Ge, Ge!" Owen grabbed West's shoulder and shouted desperately, "Exactly

what is happening?”

Owen's shouts jolted West out of his shock. He managed to find his voice and stammered out, "The Dan-Danyas are raiding us..."

The army had been under the impression that the Danyas were plundering around Dong Zhen for provisions. Even if they were to march over to Chakou, it would take two weeks at the minimum. Due to that, the security around Chakou wasn't all that high. Instead, the army was focused on relocating the defeated Left Division and reinforcing the city walls. They didn't know that it was only a pretense that the Danyas were still at Dong Zhen.

Contrary to their expectations, the Danyas didn't attack from land. Instead, they had used ships and landed at the Linhai Marshes. Using the marshes as a shield, they secretly approached Chakou. They planned a surprise attack during the night, focusing their attack force at the back side of Chakou.

As they were under the impression that the Danyas were going for a direct frontal attack, the army had placed most of its forces at the front side of Chakou. The back side had been left particularly undefended. The forces placed at the back were mainly the crippled Left Division. The army was also in the process of reinforcing the city walls and city gate. They had been caught totally unprepared by the sneak attack. The city gate had been breached almost instantly.

With the gate breached, the entire city sank into confusion. It was complete chaos. The commanders couldn't find the soldiers, and the soldiers couldn't find the commanders. Everyone was mixed together in a gigantic mass, each trying to run for their lives.

If the Danyas had arrived this quickly, then it meant they had split their army into two. While one was attacking Dong Zhen, the other was already heading for Chakou! But West never heard news of the Danyas attacking by sea! Truthfully, they simply didn't have enough information on the Danyas. Humans had always viewed them as foolish barbarians. Now though, it looked like the truly stupid and ignorant were the humans themselves!

It was over. Now, everything was over. The Danyas were fierce and swift in their attacks, appearing very well suited to warfare. They even had an advanced navy. In contrast, the people of Zhan Yan were all muddleheaded. They were

completely unaware that they were facing such a powerful enemy. It all made West very discouraged. All he wanted to do was find Owen, pull him along, and escape with the other soldiers.

Now however, the girl's black hair moved in a violent dance, the vines matching the movement. The Danyas who were as big and strong as demons suddenly didn't seem as intimidating anymore. Shocked expressions even appeared on the Danyas' faces, as if they had seen an evil spirit. Then, the previously invincible Danyas met their end as they were run over or sent flying by the vines.

At that moment, West came to a sudden realization.

The war had just begun.

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: Syrra, PiKairi



# Chapter 2: The Assassins' Attack... An Assassin Guard

Is an assassin's training hard?  
Maybe? Quite a few died during training, though I don't remember the exact number.  
In any case, the only thing I want to do is kill you!  
A human can't beat someone as strong as you. Even the harshest of trainings won't be enough!  
I... Can I really kill you?  
But I have to; I must...  
I will definitely kill you! Gong Hua!

—Cas

"Owen brought me along with him to ask for help from West. At the time, West was part of the military, so Owen and I ended up joining the war. We went around the battlefields killing Danyas until the war was almost over."

At that, Yin Qie Zi smiled scornfully and said, "You know how good I am at killing. Killing ten thousand Danyas wasn't a problem for me at all."

"Owen let you kill?" Cas narrowed his eyes in slight disbelief. He had been very young back then. Many years had also passed; thus many things were a blur to him. However, Owen had been his teacher. He still had an impression of Owen's character.

Yin Qie Zi lightly replied, "Owen wanted to atone for his crimes. He wanted to redeem himself by joining the war and demonstrating meritorious conduct. He hoped our arrest warrant would be revoked because of it."

Truthfully, at that time, he didn't understand what "atoning for one's sins" meant. It was simply because Owen had wanted to join the war. Since he followed Owen everywhere, he also followed him onto the battlefield. To ensure Owen's safety, he always killed off any enemies that came near Owen. Unwittingly, the two of them had become a lethal weapon in West's arsenal.

They were sent wherever the army was having trouble fighting.

Although he said that he had killed around ten thousand people, it was impossible to count the actual number.

He had even mistakenly killed a Leaf. A female Leaf, who had a head of sea blue hair, named Aquamarine.

He was her Guardian Flower, yet he had killed her. Instead, it was a Danya, their enemy, who kept on swearing he would take revenge for her. At that point, Yin Qie Zi still hadn't lost his powers. That Danya who went by the name Indigo was strong, but he wasn't strong enough to defeat a physical spirit. Yet whenever Yin Qie Zi saw the other, he would run away.

Due to that, Indigo became the Danyas' greatest weapon in dealing with the Flower.

He would go onto the battlefield, but whenever Indigo came chasing after him, he would run away. Those kinds of absurd encounters lasted until the war ended. Since then, he had never come across Indigo again.

Facing Cas, he gave a clear account of when he had killed the Leaf. It was to ensure that Cas wouldn't use the Leaf Tribe to threaten him. After all, his hands were already stained with the blood of a Leaf.

"You—"

Just when Cas was about to make a sarcastic remark, shouts of alarm unexpectedly erupted in the air. Both of them froze in shock, and then quickly ran over to the prison's window. But because the window was too small and the lighting too dim, they couldn't see much of anything besides a few moving shadows.

"Damn it!"

Cas took out a key, turned, and inserted it into the wall. He then gave a kick and a piece of the prison's sturdy wall relented. Yin Qie Zi stared in surprise at the other's actions, but then noticed that the wall had given way to a secret door.

Cas bent down, but before he went in, he snarled at Yin Qie Zi, "Stay here and

watch the door. Don't let any Leaves or anyone else leave! You know what will happen if you do!"

His words surprised Yin Qie Zi. He had thought that Cas had merely been waiting here for him. Looking at the situation now though, it seemed the other had been assigned the duty of guarding the Leaves. Cas... Exactly what was he?

Noises of an uproar drifted out of the prison. Most of the noise was made from the clashing of weapons, but an occasional shout was mixed in there. To Yin Qie Zi, those voices couldn't be any more familiar. Leaves had higher voices than humans. It wasn't all that difficult to distinguish them.

Should he go in and see what was going on? Yin Qie Zi was somewhat undecided. Then suddenly, someone scrambled their way out of the secret door. He'd thought the person was Cas; he certainly didn't expect it to be a Leaf, a female one.

Yin Qie Zi stared at her. Normally, it would be quite difficult to tell whether a Leaf was male or female. Regardless of their sex, Leaves all had a delicate and fragile physique. Distinguishing the sex of a Leaf was definitely trickier than distinguishing the sex of a human. From the first glance however, Yin Qie Zi knew the Leaf was female. After all, he had once sat underneath the Spirit Tree and watched Leaves pass back and forth before him. He had watched them for at least a few decades.

The Leaf was slender. Her face was bright and clear, so much that it appeared she was glowing. She also had a head of lustrous, red hair. Her appearance wasn't all that different from the Leaves in Yin Qie Zi's memories: beautiful, delicate, and full of color.

The red-haired Leaf was shocked when she saw Yin Qie Zi standing outside. She hadn't expected someone to be guarding the door. When she got a clearer look at Yin Qie Zi though, she became doubtful. The other was merely a boy; he didn't look like a guard at all.

The Leaf stared at Yin Qie Zi, sizing him up and trying to guess his identity. On the other hand, Yin Qie Zi was at a complete loss of what to do.

Should he stop her from running away? He then recalled Cas' warning and his heart sank. He growled out, "The palace is heavily guarded. You won't be able to

run away. Return to the prison!”

The red-haired Leaf did not run away, but she also did not return to the prison. She merely stared at Yin Qie Zi in a daze, or to be more accurate, she stared at his hair with a puzzled expression on her face.

“You—” She started speaking.

At that moment, Yin Qie Zi quickly stepped up and pulled the Leaf over to his side. She was startled by his sudden action, but then noticed that a masked-man dressed in black had appeared at the spot where she had been previously standing.

The masked-man had his sword raised and was about to strike down the Leaf, but unexpectedly, she had been pulled away at the last minute. He quickly changed his target, deciding to take care of the one who had stolen his prey first.

Yin Qie Zi pushed the Leaf aside. He pulled out a short sword and blocked the masked-man’s fierce attack. He applied pressure down the length of his opponent’s blade and nimbly flicked it aside. Not wasting a second, Yin Qie Zi immediately stepped forward and aimed a stab at the other’s chest. Unfortunately, the masked-man swiftly dodged the attack. Yin Qie Zi’s sword merely grazed his shoulder and didn’t cause any major injury.

Seeing this, Yin Qie Zi became slightly irritated. If his own shoulder injury wasn’t affecting his speed, his attack surely would’ve hit the mark.

When he saw that his opponent was quite strong, the masked-man, disregarding his own safety, directly turned to attack the Leaf standing off to the side.

Despite the masked-man’s fearless move, Yin Qie Zi was even faster. He slashed down on the man’s sword and at the same time, analyzed the components of the spirits that made up the blade. As the two of them traded blows, Yin Qie Zi went about breaking the chains that held together the other’s sword. Finally, he forcefully hacked down. The man’s sword split apart with a crack. The blade fell onto the ground, immediately shattering into thousands of silver pieces.

The masked-man’s eyes widened; he couldn’t believe someone who was this

adept at breaking spirit chains existed.

His shock gave Yin Qie Zi an opportunity; he immediately swung his short sword up to the man's neck. The edge of his sword was pressed right against the man's throat, so that if he dared to move the slightest bit, his neck would instantly be cut.

What if the masked-man stayed still? What should he do then? Yin Qie Zi wrinkled his brows, but he didn't have to worry for long. His opponent suddenly stepped forward, unhesitatingly slicing his own neck.

Yin Qie Zi stared down at the body that was still twitching incessantly on the ground. He slowly pulled his sword back, his heart perturbed. It was rare to see a suicidal soldier who would kill himself upon the failure of his mission. The people behind soldiers like those were true dignitaries.

"Yin Qie Zi!"

He turned in the direction of the voice and saw Cas coming out of the secret door. An angry expression was on Cas' face, but when he saw the body on the ground and the Leaf standing off to the side, most of his anger dissipated. The corners of his lips lifted up in a contemplative smile.

"I didn't imagine that you would actually prevent a Leaf from escaping."

At Cas' words, a wave of anger rose up in Yin Qie Zi. He almost yelled out "The one who asked me to prevent the Leaves from escaping was you!" No matter what though, he didn't dare to enrage Cas. If Cas exposed his true identity, then his plan for revenge would be all for naught. He could only clench his fist and resist from giving into his anger.

Speaking of identity, Yin Qie Zi abruptly remembered his question on Cas' identity. He asked bewildered, "Why are you protecting the Leaves?"

Cas frowned when he heard the question, but quickly relaxed his expression and lazily replied, "I'm doing it so I can pay for my meals. My employer told me to guard these slaves closely. I'm not allowed to let them escape, and of course, I'm also not allowed to let them die."

When he finished speaking, he grabbed the red-haired Leaf's arm. Without an ounce of care, he roughly pulled her to his side. The Leaf gave a shout of pain



and staggered over to Cas. The sound of metal on metal sliced the air.

At that moment, Yin Qie Zi noticed that the Leaf's ankles were shackled. There was no way she could have escaped. Even if he had decided to help her out, there was no way he could have escaped the heavily guarded palace together with a Leaf in shackles.

"Get inside!"

Cas brusquely tried to shove the Leaf back through the secret door. She grabbed onto the stone ledge and refused to let go. With great effort, she turned to look at Yin Qie Zi and asked in panic, "Please, can I ask—"

The Leaf appeared extremely frantic, but Yin Qie Zi was even more frantic inside. He didn't know whether Leaves were capable of recognizing him. Twenty years ago, Aquamarine had immediately recognized him. He didn't know whether it was because she had the ability to identify Flowers, or if she had simply recognized him because she had seen him sitting underneath the Tree before.

Before she could finish her words however, Cas kicked her through the door. Aside from letting out a groan of pain, the Leaf had no time to ask any questions.

Hearing the Leaf's groan, Yin Qie Zi's hand tightened around his short sword. He coldly stated, "The one you want to take revenge on is me; there is no need to harm the Leaves. I no longer have anything to do with them. I've even killed one of them before!"

Cas glanced over at Yin Qie Zi a few times and let out a cold laugh. "You should look at your own expression before you speak. Your ability to lie is worse than it was twenty years ago."

Yin Qie Zi turned his head away, refusing to argue with the other. He then noticed that he couldn't hear the sounds of fighting from inside the prison anymore. "Are all of the assassins dead? Are there any left for questioning?"

Cas' lips lifted in a smile. "Are you that worried about these Leaves? Don't worry; I'm not the only one who's looking after them. There are 35 guards, 30 spiritmancers, and 5 spirit charmers situated around here." Intentionally or otherwise, Cas especially listed off the number of guards assigned around the

prison. It was a number Yin Qie Zi definitely couldn't defeat by himself. Or at least, a number he couldn't defeat after having lost his powers.

"Can I ask..."

Yin Qie Zi turned in the direction of the voice. The red-haired Leaf had grabbed onto the metal bars that barricaded the prison's small window and was peering out at him. With a doubtful expression, she asked, "Your hair color is silvery-purple. Do you have any relations to the Leaf Lord—"

"I'm completely unrelated to the Leaf Tribe." Yin Qie Zi immediately cut her off.

The Leaf stared in surprise, an expression of disbelief on her face. Yin Qie Zi felt her reaction was a bit strange, because as far as he knew, the Leaf Tribe was not one to doubt people. Then again, Yin Qie Zi had forgotten almost everything he once knew about the Leaf Tribe. Most of what he knew now was what he had heard from humans. For example, Mila was the one who had told him that that the Leaves' staple food was the fruit leaf. Due to that, he wasn't quite sure if Leaves were capable of suspecting others.

"Hahaha! I can't believe you're even stupider than you were twenty years ago." Cas burst into laughter, and then said in mockery, "She used the Leaf language to ask you that question and then you even replied to her in the same tongue. Even the dumbest Leaf wouldn't believe you!"

Yin Qie Zi's eyes widened in shock, finally noticing his mistake. Except the words were already out, and there was no way he could take them back.

The red-haired Leaf stared at Yin Qie Zi. She did not question his answer, but her expression was one of complete doubt.

Cas smirked, his eyes shifting from the Leaf to Yin Qie Zi and back again. This made Yin Qie Zi extremely worried, he was afraid Cas would expose his identity as a Flower. He quickly said, "It's about time for me to leave. If I don't leave soon, morning will come, and then I won't be able to leave."

Although he said that, would Cas actually allow him to leave? Cas had said that he would make him experience pain and suffering for the rest of his life, and at the moment, there was nothing more painful to him than being exposed as a

Flower in front of the Leaf.

At that thought, Yin Qie Zi looked at Cas in alarm. The latter, however, only coldly remarked, “What are you looking at? If you’re going to leave, then get lost.”

Yin Qie Zi stared in surprised at the other. That was the best answer he could’ve asked for. Without any further delay, he immediately turned to leave, lest Cas changed his mind.

“Please wait!”

Hearing the Leaf’s plea, Yin Qie Zi’s footsteps slowed. He wanted to turn around and take a final look at her, but stopped himself before he could fully turn around. He then left without turning his head back.

“Wait—”

“Shut up! If you call after him one more time, I’ll go and beat up every one of your tribespeople,” Cas snarled.

While Cas didn’t know how Yin Qie Zi had lost his powers, it was best if he gave the other no opportunity to regain them. For example, the cries of the Leaf asking for help from the Flower could possibly be one such opportunity.

Cas was also knowledgeable on how to threaten Leaves. Rather than saying he would beat her, it was better to say that he would beat her tribespeople. However, these Leaves were peace offerings under strict protection, so he couldn’t actually lay a hand on them. However, there was no harm in voicing the occasional threat. If he truly wanted to beat them, he would pick a male Leaf and hit him where it couldn’t be seen. Even then, it wouldn’t result in any heavy consequences.

When she heard that her tribesmen would suffer, the Leaf immediately closed her mouth, afraid to utter even a single word. She glanced over at Cas. His ferocious expression frightened her so much that she ducked back inside the prison, afraid to look out the window again.

She rested her back against the wall and slowly slid down to sit. Her head of red hair was made into a mess by the friction, but she paid it no attention. All she had on her mind at the moment was the person who had just left.

That head of silvery-purple hair... Originally, she had thought that he was someone the Leaf Lord had sent to save them. It appeared now though, that she was wrong. She couldn't help but feel extremely disappointed.

Another Leaf walked up and sat beside her. He asked in a concerned voice, "What's wrong, Yan Er? Did those assassins scare you?"

Yan Er raised her head to look. It was Hong Yan. The two of them looked very similar, both had red hair. If speaking of bloodlines, then Hong Yan was Yan Er's older brother. The Leaf Tribe, however, didn't have any concept of family hierarchy. Fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters all called each other by name, regardless of their seniority.

"No. Compared to our current situation, how could those assassins even be scary?" Yan Er then said somewhat disheartened, "I saw someone who had silvery-purple hair. I'd thought he was somehow related to the Leaf Lord, but it turns out I was wrong."

Hong Yan patted her shoulder and said, "What does it matter? Soon enough, we'll probably all return to the Tree's side."

The word "death" did not exist in the Leaf Tribe's language. They believed that when a Leaf died, they would return to the Spirit Tree, becoming its branches and leaves. They referred to this cycle as "return."

Yan Er became even more troubled at her brother's words.

"Then why haven't we returned yet? The Continent of Xi Zong no longer has a Spirit Tree and we can't walk or live on land without a Tree. We could probably have supported ourselves for a year or two, but twenty years have already passed since then. Everyone has gradually become weaker over the years, but no one has returned to the Tree's side. How is this possible?"

"I don't know." Hong Yan was also puzzled. It was probably more accurate to say that every single Leaf still in Xi Zong at the moment was puzzled. Moreover, they were currently caught in a helpless situation. They had no idea when they would return to the Tree's side, nor what to do at the moment. They wanted to escape from their future as slaves, but they knew that even if they did escape, sooner or later, they would be caught again by humans.

Even though Hong Yan was at a complete loss himself, he still patted Yan Er's shoulder reassuringly. He consoled her, "Don't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid of returning to the Tree's side, but not knowing when it will happen makes me..." Yan Er didn't know how to describe her current feelings. It was rare for a Leaf to feel that sort of emotion.

"Restless and apprehensive?"

Yan Er nodded in response and added, "And I don't feel a true desire to escape. Even if I do, soon after, I will probably have to return to the Tree's side."

Hong Yan nodded and looked around at his tribesmen. Most of them had on vacant expressions. Perhaps he also had the same expression. Vacant and at a loss, the only thing they could do was continue to wait; yet they didn't even know what they were waiting for.

Who was it that wanted to kill them? Yan Er suddenly thought of the question, and then another: Would they come again?

She pondered the matter. Why would it matter if those assassins came again? Would they be ruining anything? Maybe they would return to the Tree's side tomorrow, maybe...

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On the way back, Yin Qie Zi had wanted to quickly return to the Warlord's estate, but there were more guards in the palace than there had been when he came in. It was probably due to the sudden appearance of assassins at the prison.

The heavy security forced him to stop numerous times on his way out of the palace. Every single time he stopped, he had to find a hiding place, either squeezing between hidden breaks in the walls or hiding behind the backs of pillars. The slow pace made him agitated, but there was no way he could speed up.

Using the buildings' shadows, he finally managed to return to the sewer mouth he had used to infiltrate the palace. Just when he was about to jump in, he saw some people walking his way. Yin Qie Zi quickly hid in the walls' shadows and quieted his breathing.

As the group of people came closer, their voices also became clearer. Yin Qie Zi found that he didn't understand what they were talking about. The language they were speaking in wasn't the human language, nor was it the Leaf language. He couldn't resist sneaking a glance at them out of the corner of his eye. There were approximately six of them... Wait a second!

Yin Qie Zi stared in surprise, finding the stature of the group to be somewhat strange. They all seemed, seemed a bit too tall.

As the six of them were around the same height, at a distance, there looked to be nothing strange about them. As they got closer though, Yin Qie Zi clearly saw that something was off. The tallest among the group had to be at least over two meters while the shortest was around 180 centimeters. Yin Qie Zi heard a female voice among the group and deduced that the shortest one was a woman. A woman who was 180 centimeters tall?

Right, they had to be Danyas!

Yin Qie Zi moved to hide behind a pillar and snuck a few more glances at the group. Most of them had white hair, streaked with other colors. As it was night, he couldn't get a clear look at them. Moreover, they weren't speaking the human language, so he didn't understand them either. Their height and hair color, however, definitely confirmed his suspicions that they were Danyas.

*What are Danyas doing here?* Yin Qie Zi frowned, but understood after thinking carefully. These Danyas were probably emissaries who were here to collect the peace offerings.

The Danyas walked by Yin Qie Zi, just ten steps away from the latter. Yin Qie Zi saw that two of the Danyas were women, the other four men. Most of them had white hair streaked mainly with gold, but there were a small amount of other colors mixed in. One of the men had only gold streaks in his hair; with none of the other colors mixed in.

Was he Gold of the Four Colors? Yin Qie Zi frowned at his discovery.

At that moment, the Danya with the purest hair stopped in his steps and looked left and right. His companions also paused. They looked at him in confusion; one of the women even opened her mouth to ask what was wrong, but he lifted a hand and waved her question away.

He then shouted loudly, “I am Jin Qi Er of Danya. No matter who you are, please come out!”

He had spoken in the human language, appearing very fluent in it and almost had no accent. However, Yin Qie Zi did not do as the other asked. Instead, he slowed his breathing even more and plastered himself against the wall, ensuring that there wouldn't be the slightest chance of him being discovered.

Jin Qie Er frowned, but couldn't find any visible problems even after looking left and right. Finally he turned and spoke with his companions. The group of Danyas continued walking and left.

Only when he couldn't see them anymore, did Yin Qie Zi dare to step out of his hiding place. He turned to look in the direction in which the group had left. That Jin Qie Er probably wasn't one of the Four Colors. If he were one of the Colors, he would've referred to himself as Gold. It was like how that Danya with blue-streaked hair had always called himself Indigo, never using another name.

If that man wasn't Gold, then Indigo wouldn't have come, right?

Inexplicably, Yin Qie Zi gave a sigh of relief. He finally slipped into the sewer and swam out of the royal palace. Without stopping to rest, he ran for the Warlord's mansion. By the time he returned, the night sky was already starting to lighten. It was about time for him to have breakfast with Mila.

He found a hidden corner and wrung out his clothes. He then went into the mansion through the front door, as if he had nothing to hide. In any case, he was currently a guest. He wasn't worried if he would be seized or have his way blocked. This was much safer than climbing the walls anyways. They did say that the Warlord's estate was harder to break into than the royal palace.

The palace occupied a large expanse of land, so not every block was heavily guarded. On the other hand, the Warlord's residence occupied a much smaller piece of land. The Warlord himself was also the head of a spiritmancer regiment. Even Yin Qie Zi, who had scouted the Warlord's residence for many years, didn't know how many spiritmancers the estate housed.

Although it was already time for breakfast, Yin Qie Zi headed towards his room instead. He had only wrung his clothes out enough to prevent them from dripping. Under the dusky sky, the guards at the door most likely hadn't noticed

that his clothes were wet. However, Mila would certainly notice that something was off, so he had to change his clothes first. He probably would have to change the bandage on his shoulder too. Due to the fighting earlier and also the wet bandage, his wound was starting to ache again.

When he opened the door to his room, Yin Qie Zi froze in shock. Owen was sitting on his bed, facing the door, looking like he was waiting for him to return. Owen's expression was also extremely ominous, appearing as if he had some business to settle.

"Ah, so you finally returned! Then I'll go back to my room to sleep." Seeing that the situation was about to go rancid, Litelli quickly scampered out of the room without bothering to explain the current circumstances to Yin Qie Zi.

Though even without an explanation, Yin Qie Zi more or less understood. Most likely, news of the uproar at the palace had already spread. He really had wasted too much in coming back. Owen probably suspected that he was the one who had broken into the palace and came to check in on him. In the end, he was still a Flower, the guardian of the Leaf Tribe.

"Where did you go?" Owen asked coldly.

Yin Qie Zi wanted to lie and say he went back to his house to grab some medicine, but he didn't even have a single jar on his person to back up his lie. Plus, his clothes were still wet.

"You didn't go to the palace did you? We heard it had been attacked, my father's already on his way there." Owen suppressed his rising anger and asked, "Were you the one who attacked the palace?"

"If it were me, do you think I would still be standing here in front of you?" Yin Qie Zi snappily answered.

Owen abruptly stood up and growled, "Who knows? Maybe you had an accomplice? Maybe you're actually stronger than you've led me to think? Maybe you've never actually lost your powers? In any case, you refuse to tell me anything!"

Exactly like Owen described, Yin Qie Zi quieted down, refusing to say anything. When he saw that Owen's expression was worsening with no signs of



improvement, he finally opened his mouth to explain. “It really wasn’t me. I only wanted to see them. I didn’t disturb anyone else; otherwise, I wouldn’t have had such an easy escape.”

Hearing that, Owen’s face relaxed a bit. He then suspiciously asked, “Then did you see the attackers?”

Yin Qie Zi hesitated for a moment, but decided to tell the truth. “Yes I did. I even defeated one of them.”

Owen’s eyes brightened at those words and he quickly asked, “Was he strong? But your wound hasn’t healed right?”

Yin Qie Zi pondered over the question. “If using humans as the standard, then his strength would be in upper middle third. Also, he was a suicidal soldier. He killed himself the minute his mission failed.”

Owen stared in surprise at him. “Mission? Did they want to save the Leaves?”

Yin Qie Zi furrowed his brows and replied, “No, looking at the situation, I’d say that they wanted to kill the Leaves.” *Did any of the Leaves get injured during the confusion?* At that thought, his mood turned gloomy.

“Kill the Leaves?” Owen frowned and mumbled confusedly, “Those Leaves are only peace offerings. They are totally harmless...”

Yin Qie Zi’s expression immediately darkened when he heard Owen’s mumbles. Owen himself also paused in shock. If someone had tried to kill the peace offerings, then did they want to destroy the current peace?

“Does someone want to start another war?” Yin Qie Zi asked quickly, feeling uneasy.

Owen scratched his head, and said while nodding, “Yes, a pro-war faction has always existed in this country. The last war between Zhan Yan and Danya was twenty years ago. Plenty of people are itching for a new war.”

Yin Qie Zi hesitated, but then questioned, “Does that include Warlord Paladin?”

“My father has never said it directly, but he is the head of a spiritmancer regiment. So he would naturally belong in the pro-war faction.” Owen didn’t feel

all that disturbed at this revelation. He shrugged and bluntly stated, “Wouldn’t it be strange for the head of a spiritmancer regiment to advocate for peace?”

“The strange ones are the people who want to start a war. War is completely meaningless,” Yin Qie Zi said quietly.

“Battles can hone soldiers. Without war, it would be impossible for a soldier to obtain the title of Warlord. Even climbing to the position of War Marshal would be a stretch.”

At the new voice, Owen and Yin Qie Zi lifted their heads and looked towards the door. They saw Mila sitting with a smile on her wheelchair. She looked at Yin Qie Zi, her expression seemingly saying that she agreed with his comment of how “war is meaningless.”

Owen said, “Mila, you’re here? It is about time for breakfast, why don’t we eat first?” His last question was directed at Yin Qie Zi.

Yin Qie Zi nodded in response, relaxing a bit. Owen seemed to believe him and didn’t appear all that angry anymore.

The three of them moved to the dining room. The array of dishes on the dining table was rather sumptuous, but Yin Qie Zi only took a plate of fruit leaf. He couldn’t help but feel grateful towards Mila’s attentiveness.

Soon, Mila and Yin Qie Zi finished their meal. Owen was still gorging himself, so the two of them started chatting casually.

Mila smiled as she explained her previous words. “It was due to the war between Danya and Zhan Yan that my father rose to the position of War Marshal. After he represented Zhan Yan and signed the peace treaty between our two countries, he was given the title of Warlord. His promotion was the fastest ever recorded in history.”

Yin Qie Zi asked confusedly, “If they want to start a war merely for their own promotions, then what benefit does it pose to other people? His Majesty the King certainly won’t agree with this, he surely doesn’t need any promotion.”

“Much of Danya is covered with deserts or grasslands. Most of their people raise livestock as their way of living. Due to that, they’ve always had a shortage in grains and other types of foodstuff. It has already been twenty years since the

last war. Without war to trim their population, I'm afraid it has grown to a degree that they can't support. Even if Zhan Yan doesn't go to war with them now, sooner or later, the Danyas will plunder our country due to shortage of food. So it would be better if we attacked first. If we do, we can take them down before they are prepared."

At that moment, Mila paused, and then added, "At least, that's what the pro-war faction has theorized. As for His Majesty the King... Just inside the Zangxia Gates, there is a large area of fertile grasslands. To the north, we have the Southern Gulf Mountains, which are rich in precious minerals. Deeper in, we have the Chushi Forests, where many unique and special spirits live. There are also unconfirmed rumors that one of the beasts' rulers, Soaring Phoenix, lives there. There are rumors saying that its feathers and blood can be made into a miracle drug that can prolong one's life."

Yin Qie Zi understood. The pro-war faction wanted war for their own promotions. The king wanted war to keep hold of his land, and perhaps also catch Soaring Phoenix.

"I heard from Owen that you've met another one of the beasts' rulers, called Nightclaw?"

Yin Qie Zi shook his head. "Beasts don't have such things as rulers. There are only a few physical spirits. Soaring Phoenix is a bird-type physical spirit, Nightclaw is a beast-type, and there's also the mermaid of the sea. Soaring Phoenix's blood truly is special and precious. It can be made into an antidote which works for practically every poison imaginable. As for its feathers, if you break the chains that bind the spirits together, you can add it to armor or weapons. It can be used to lighten the weight of metal armor and weapons. Other than that, I've never heard of making the feathers into medicine."

Mila smiled and said, "It's only a legend. There are also legends saying that Nightclaw's eyes can be made into formidable spiritual weapons."

"I'm not very knowledgeable about weapon-making. Though if someone is capable of getting Nightclaw's eyes, then they are probably strong enough that they don't need a spiritual weapon."

Mila laughed and nodded. "You're probably right."

They continued chatting for a while, but Yin Qie Zi couldn't suppress the unease in his heart. He opened his mouth and asked, "If the king truly belongs to the pro-war faction, then is war inevitable?" More importantly, were the Leaves labeled as peace offerings marked for death?

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Translator: Nannyn  
Proofreaders: Syrra, PiKairi

# Chapter 3: Left Eye... The Royal Assassin

In order to raise money and buy information, I had to accept several difficult missions.

In the end, the president of the Assassin's Guild came knocking on my door. There's even a guild for assassins! How ridiculous. My stomach hurts from laughing.

But this guild is pretty convenient for accepting missions and obtaining information. Only, I still don't have any tips on the matter I want to know the most—Gong Hua's whereabouts.

The guild president brought me to meet someone.

"If you can work solely for me, I'll give you the best reward!"

I've heard this phrase hundreds of times before. Every employer of mine loved saying it. How extremely dull. I'm not interested in having someone provide for me. However, the person who had said those words this time has a troublesome identity. He is a king.

The guild president put it bluntly, "It's your choice. Either become the assassin of the royal family or die."

Damn it, does that even count as a choice?

—Cas

"Someone wants to kill the Leaves? Is it part of the Danyas' plans?"

Edward directed the question to the person in front of him. It was a man with a scar on his left eye; even his code name was Left Eye. Edward hadn't known the assassin for all that long, merely six or seven years. Compared to the time he'd known Owen, his playmate since childhood, those six or seven years were nothing. However, he often felt that the man in front of him was the one who understood him best.

That thought sometimes made him uneasy. He'd always felt that Left Eye knew and understood everything about him. But that was impossible, definitely impossible.

"I don't know anything about that," Left Eye responded indifferently. "You

gave the order to protect the Leaves, so I did. Anything other than that is none of my business.”

Left Eye always did as his orders commanded him. He did them without asking, without going overboard, and without any hesitation. No matter how absurd his orders were, he did as he was told without making any errors. It was Left Eye’s style, an admirable style.

“If I didn’t have you, then it’d be like I was missing one of my eyes,” Edward praised the other man with a slight smile. Left Eye’s expression darkened when he heard the praise. Thinking that he knew the reason, Edward immediately explained, “Don’t worry, I’ve already promised you. I will release you when I ascend the throne. This agreement hasn’t changed. In fact, I’m even more determined to do it. You truly have helped me out a lot.”

Left Eye coldly smiled and said, “Save it. The more you rely on me and want to release me, the more you can’t allow me to actually leave.”

Edward was shocked, so much that he was unable to refute Left Eye’s claim.

When he had reached adulthood, the king had given Left Eye to him as a present. He was alarmed at the fact that, secretly, his father had several assassins under his command. But he couldn’t deny that the existences of those assassins were necessary. After he took over some of Zhan Yan’s governmental affairs, he truly became more dependent on Left Eye. He had left many of his work for the assassin to do, thus becoming more inseparable from the other.

Would he really be able to honor his promise and allow Left Eye to leave after he ascended the throne? Left Eye was extremely capable at handling things, plus he also knew too much...

Left Eye looked detachedly at the silent prince. He didn’t feel any disappointment, as he had already guessed this outcome.

Unexpectedly, Edward gave a heavy sigh and said easily, “I will still allow you to leave. It is a promise the royal family has made. It will not change. However, before you leave, I hope you’ll still be willing to help me take care of things.”

The prince’s words left Left Eye a little surprised, but he revealed none of that surprise on his face. As coldly as ever, he stated, “So you’ll feel better if I went

about killing people willingly?”

Edward stared in shock at the assassin when he heard those words. A wave of anger immediately rose up in him. “Zhan · Cas · Tershiziel!”

Upon hearing that name, Left Eye appeared as if he had been stabbed with a knife. He growled, “Don’t call me Cas! I’m an assassin who kills people! Assassins never use their real name!”

Edward snorted coldly and said in a warning tone, “Then you best remember that I am your superior. Don’t always address me as ‘you!’ ”

“Yes, it is as Your Highness has said. Your subordinate here is at fault. This humble subordinate will now immediately go investigate the recent attack.” Left Eye had used honorifics in his reply, but his voice was completely sarcastic. It was a special talent of his.

*How polite of him.* Edward rolled his eyes and pondered over Left Eye’s words. After hesitating for a moment, he said, “No, there’s no need to investigate. It’s fine as long as you protect those peace offerings.”

“I agree. If the investigation turned out that a certain someone’s father had been behind this whole thing, then the situation would surely turn ugly.”

At those words, a light flashed in Edward’s eyes. This was the fundamental reason why he relied so much on Left Eye. The assassin could always pinpoint the root cause of any suspicious happenings.

If it weren’t the Danyas, then the perpetrator had to be one of his own countrymen. Most likely, it had to have been the pro-war faction’s doing. The only thing he wasn’t sure of was the social status of the mastermind. Disregarding Left Eye’s notion that his own father had been behind the whole thing, even if it had been one of leaders of the three spiritmancer regiments, the situation would still turn troublesome.

Edward rubbed his temples, thinking that it might be time for him to go and find the head of the Xialan Spiritmancer Regiment, Chris, and have a talk with him. However, he should probably go to Owen first. The latter *was* the son of Warlord Paladin and the student of Commander Chris. He should be aware of many things.

Thinking of Owen, Edward was reminded of another person. He quickly asked Left Eye, “Oh right, what about the matter I told you to investigate last time? The one on Yin Qie Zi.”

A light flashed through Left Eye’s eyes. He then calmly reported, “He had been through several towns before and had told people that he lost his parents in the war 20 years ago. He was then adopted by the spirit binder Lequilier and became his student.”

“That famous spirit binder Lequilier?” Edward exclaimed aloud.

“Yup, that’s the one. I also found out that Lequilier isn’t human. He’s of the Servile Spirits Tribe, the tribe where everyone is short,” Cas replied lazily.

Edward stared in surprise. He had heard that Lequilier wasn’t human, but he didn’t think that the spirit binder belonged to the Servile Spirits Tribe. The tribe was well-known but small in population; they appeared in all sorts of folklores.

“But I’ve heard that the Servile Spirits mostly work as spirit charmers rather than spirit binders.”

Left Eye shrugged and said, “I haven’t investigated that, but I am ninety percent sure that Lequilier is from the Servile Spirits Tribe. I’ll remind you now that if you ever come across someone from the Servile Spirits Tribe, don’t ever mention that they work as spirit charmers. They see themselves as servile spirits, so they’ll be unhappy if they were called spirit charmers. They might even severely lecture you on this, either by words or by fists. Don’t think they wouldn’t just because you are a prince!”

Edward paused and pondered over Left Eye’s warning, but he couldn’t determine what use it was to him. At most, he understood that he couldn’t keep Lequilier under his own personal employ. He then reminded Left Eye, “Continue your report on Yin Qie Zi.”

Left Eye nodded and continued, “Yin Qie Zi left his teacher’s side a few years ago and became a spirit binder himself. About a year ago, he came to Qi Feng and opened a spirit medicine shop. His prices are ridiculously high, but the qualities of his elixirs are very good.”

Left Eye paused and then added, “As for his origins, I can say that I’m not even



fifty percent sure of the information I've obtained. I wasn't able to find Lequillier to verify my findings. Plus, there are too many villages that had been destroyed during the war twenty years ago."

"I understand." Edward nodded and changed the subject. "I'm quite curious, why are you so knowledgeable about the Servile Spirits?"

"I'm looking for someone." Left Eye paused and glanced at Edward, who nodded to show that he knew. Left Eye then continued, "By chance, I came across them during my search. I've also been to their land."

"You know where they live?" Edward's eyes widened. He was greatly interested in the topic.

Left Eye nodded and glanced sideways at his superior. He warned, "Don't provoke them needlessly. Around half of them have the ability to become spirit charmers. Their tribe's population ranges around one hundred thousand, which means they have around fifty thousand spirit charmers!"

Upon hearing that number, Edward gasped and mumbled, "What immense power. If we could strike an alliance with them..."

"Dream on!" Left Eye said brusquely, "Unless you are a physical spirit, then they have no interest in you. All they think about is becoming the dog of a physical spirit."

Edward stared blankly at Left Eye, his mood deflating. He couldn't resist complaining, "Why are the Servile Spirits so strange? They have fifty thousand capable spirit charmers! If we can obtain that power..."

Left Eye sneered coldly and said in a mocking voice, "If they weren't so strange, then all of Xi Zong would belong to them. If that happened, humans wouldn't even have gotten a turn at dominating the continent!"

Edward paused in shock and finally understood the seriousness of the matter. If a tribe in possession of fifty thousand spirit charmers abandoned their strange way of life and became interested in warfare, what kind of dreadful attacks would humankind suffer? Just thinking about it was enough to make him shudder.

"Ah, Left Eye, you truly are like my own indispensable left eye."

“...My report is finished. Can I leave?”

Edward smiled and gestured with his hand.

Left Eye turned to leave. A few steps later, he remembered something. He turned his head around and asked suspiciously, “Is the reason you especially investigated Yin Qie Zi because Warlord Paladin’s daughter truly plans on getting married to him? He’s a man of unknown origins. Even if Warlord Paladin dotes on his daughter, there is no way he would agree to such a ridiculous match.”

“That’s hard to say.” Edward gave a small smile. “She’s of weak constitution, so she would be bad for the royal line. Besides, the prince doesn’t want to marry her.”

Left Eye glanced at “the prince who didn’t want to marry her” and asked doubtfully, “Do you think His Majesty the King and the Warlord would let you off that easily?”

Edward’s expression darkened slightly. He then sighed and said, “Mila has said that she’s unable to bear children. The physician my royal father has sent also confirmed this fact.”

At this, Left Eye finally believed that Warlord Paladin might marry his daughter off to Yin Qie Zi. A woman who couldn’t bear children would be looked down upon by her husband’s family; unless, of course, she belonged to a family that one couldn’t afford to offend. Yin Qie Zi was parentless. If he were to marry Mila, then he would almost certainly live at the Warlord’s residence in the future. If that happened, then no disservice would be done to Mila herself.

*If he truly married her... Ah!*

Left Eye smiled coldly. Now, he truly wasn’t in a hurry to do anything to that guy. After all, even if he didn’t lift a finger, he would be able to watch a tragedy play out before him. So what was the rush?

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“There’s an auction taking place this afternoon, the biggest one of the year. Rumors say they are putting up one of the Leaf slaves... Ah, my bad, they are putting up one of the Leaves for auction. So go prepare yourself Yin Qie Zi. We’ll be going this afternoon to buy the Leaf. I don’t know if the Leaf is male or

female, but I'm hoping it's a female... Ah, Mila, don't hit me! Alright alright. It's a male, definitely a male."

After returning to his room, Yin Qie Zi sat beside the bed. The more he mulled over Owen's words, the more he frowned.

How much was a Leaf worth? Seeing as ten Leaves could serve as peace offerings between countries, their value was probably incredibly high, a price the average person could only dream of. But Owen and Mila were planning to buy the Leaf and then gift it to him. This was strange. Most definitely strange!

Someone suddenly knocked on his door.

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Mila."

Yin Qie Zi looked down at his injured shoulder, thinking that there was no harm in changing the bandage later. He called out, "Come in."

Mila did her best to roll her wheelchair into the room. Fenny was following behind her, but did not offer any help. Yin Qie Zi wasn't the least bit astonished at the scene; Mila always tried to do the things she could do by herself.

Yin Qie Zi paused when he saw Mila coming in and then noticed the medical kit sitting on her lap. His brows immediately furrowed at the sight.

Seeing Yin Qie Zi's expression, Mila lowered her head and asked dejectedly, "Do you think I'm not capable of doing something like this?"

"No!" Yin Qie Zi quickly explained, "I just think that this kind of thing is unsuitable for someone like you to do. I can change the bandage by myself."

"It's because you are always moving around that your wound is taking so long to heal!" Mila instantly became angry at him.

Yin Qie Zi was at a loss for words. Mila was right. During his trip to the palace, not only did he dive in and out of water, but he had also fought off an assassin. After he came back, his wound was constantly aching in pain.

"Then I'll get Litelli to help."

Mila became silent at his proposal, but then she nodded. "Alright, you must

get him to help. Don't try to bandage it by yourself. Promise me!"

Yin Qie Zi nodded in response, but Mila was unsatisfied with the action. He opened his mouth and said, "Alright, I promise you."

Even though she received Yin Qie Zi's promise, Mila waited in the room until Litelli arrived. She then personally instructed Litelli to help change Yin Qie Zi's bandage and prevent the latter from doing it himself. After leaving behind the medical kit, she finally agreed to leave.

The master and servant left in the room stared at each other. Litelli blinked innocently at Yin Qie Zi. "I did promise her to help you, but if Master wants me to break the promise, then I'll definitely have to listen to you, right? So don't stare at me like that. If you want to change the bandage by yourself, then feel free to do so!"

Yin Qie Zi was silent for a while. He subsequently let out a small sigh and said, "Come and help me."

*How very unusual!* Litelli's eyes widened and he stood still in his spot. When Yin Qie Zi shot him an icy glance, he finally opened the medical kit and took out bandages and other supplies. Yin Qie Zi had already taken off his shirt, revealing the soaked bandage on his shoulder that was dyed slightly red with blood.

His wound originally wasn't a heavy one; it had closed up and was already forming a scab. After last night's chaos though, the scab had been torn off and his wound began bleeding heavily again. The flesh around the wound had become bloated and infected due to the water.

Litelli prattled on as he changed the bandage, "You shouldn't run around like this. Medicine is pretty much ineffective on you. If your wound doesn't heal, then there's no way you can be saved!"

"I won't die that easily." Yin Qie Zi said lightly, "I had suffered burns all over my body before. The only place left unharmed was my back. Even then, I didn't die. A small injury like this can't do anything to me."

At those words, Litelli remembered the first time he had met Yin Qie Zi. The latter's battered and beaten form was a tragic sight to behold. He had never seen a physical spirit in such a sorry state. Physical spirits were superior

existences; they were always above everyone else! They weren't like that, not like...someone who had been injured in both mind and body.

Litelli helped Yin Qie Zi clean his wound. Although Yin Qie Zi didn't complain, Litelli knew that he was in pain just by looking at the muscles that were stretched taut around the wound. He also knew that the pain wasn't light, as Yin Qie Zi would only react if the pain was excessive.

"Oh right! The man you were looking for, the one with a scar on his left eye, I've finally found him!" Litelli said in a loud voice, trying to pull the other's attention from his wound.

Litelli was proud of the information he had obtained. He had spent a large amount of effort before he'd finally found his target.

"He's an assassin with the code-name Left Eye. His identity was kept unusually secretive, but I dug it all out! He's the royal family's personal assassin. That's why it was so hard to find him; he was living in the palace in the first place!"

Litelli was extremely proud of his report, but Yin Qie Zi wasn't all that surprised. He had already guessed that Cas was somehow involved with the royal family. When he noticed that Litelli was waiting for praise, he couldn't help but destroy the other's delusions. "I know. I saw him last night when I infiltrated the palace to see the Leaves. He's protecting them."

An earth-shattering expression appeared on Litelli's face when he heard Yin Qie Zi's words. Even as indifferent as he was, Yin Qie Zi was slightly sorry that he had ruined the other's mood. He quickly changed the topic.

"Owen and Mila are acting extremely strange towards me. They are treating me differently than a friend. They've provided my own private room in their house, and they also let me, a stranger, push Mila around in her wheelchair. Just recently, they even said that they would gift a Leaf to me. Exactly what are they trying to do?"

Litelli broke into laughter at his master's words. He said while wrapping a new bandage around Yin Qie Zi's shoulder, "That's simple! The beautiful Mila wants to marry you!"

Yin Qie Zi's eyes widened in surprise. "Mila wants to marry me? But, but..."

After thinking for a long while, he finally said, "I'm not human."

"Why does that matter? It's fine as long as you are 'male,' " Litelli said while laughing.

"...I can't be counted as male."

"Your name is Gong Hua, so how can you not be male?"

"Shut it!" Yin Qie Zi stood up abruptly.

Litelli quickly slapped a hand over his mouth, but continued talking nonetheless, "I didn't say anything, nothing at all. I didn't say your name!"

Yin Qie Zi's anger dissipated quickly. Regaining his calm manner, he said lightly, "I don't have the sexual characteristics of a human. I can't marry her."

"In any case, you don't plan on waiting that long, right? Didn't you already give those bottles of medicine to that boy?" Litelli said softly, "Being in a relationship with Miss Mila can help with your plans for revenge, so why don't you do it?"

Yin Qie Zi's expression changed and he burst out, "I don't plan to deceive her, her..." What was it exactly called?

"Deceive her feelings!" Litelli couldn't bear to listen to him anymore.

"Right, deceive her feelings," Yin Qie Zi repeated awkwardly after him.

Litelli said loudly, "You're already deceiving her feelings! Or are you going to come clean to her? You want to kill her and her twin brother! Why are you afraid of something like this?"

Yin Qie Zi frowned and gazed suspiciously at his servant. Litelli had always been opposed to his plans for revenge, though he had never voiced it clearly. But Yin Qie Zi knew Litelli disapproved the actions he had taken to enact his revenge. So now, why was Litelli trying to make him take advantage of another person's feelings? This was somewhat strange.

"What are you planning?" Yin Qie Zi coldly asked.

Litelli's eyes widened in response to the question. His eyes were already big, but now they looked like two big eggs embedded in his small head. He protested loudly, "I'm not planning anything! You already plan on killing her; do you also

plan on breaking up with her and then killing her? That is too cruel!”

Yin Qie Zi stared blankly at Litelli.

“The least you could do is let her live happily for these last few months!” Litelli shouted in a sharp voice. “Don’t tell me you can’t accomplish even this? You can’t be that heartless, right?”

Yin Qie Zi stayed silent, but Litelli continued shouting. He finally said frostily, “Shut up. Bring me my clothes.”

Litelli closed his mouth with an aggrieved expression. He went to the wardrobe in search of clothes and pulled out a luxurious set of clothing. It was a set of formal attire made from beige silk, decorated with many copper red threads wound in complicated patterns along the borders. It was the outfit Owen had lent Yin Qie Zi for the birthday party a few days ago.

Theoretically, the outfit had been lent to him, but Yin Qie Zi knew that it was meant to be given to him. After all, the clothes suited him too well. Owen was much taller than him, so he wouldn’t be able to fit in those clothes. Most likely, it had been custom-made for him. Because of that, he wasn’t especially determined to return the clothes to Owen.

He felt a headache coming on, however, when he looked at the luxurious outfit. He burst out, “Find some normal clothes for me.”

“Aren’t you going to the largest auction of the year?” Litelli widened his egg-sized eyes. Once again, he began to argue noisily, “It would be embarrassing if you dressed too shabbily! It’s fine if you get embarrassed, but what would you do if you humiliate Miss Mila?”

Yin Qie Zi’s headache became even more painful when he heard the clamor Litelli was making. “Shut up! I’ll wear it, so go get me a ribbon!”

Litelli closed his mouth in satisfaction. He went and picked out a hair ribbon that most suited the outfit. The copper red ribbon was a good match, though it was still a bit too simple. If the ribbon had some gold embroidery on it, then it would match the gorgeous clothes perfectly.

“What are you thinking about?”

Litelli started and turned to face Yin Qie Zi's wary eyes. He quickly handed the hair ribbon over and said innocently, "Nothing! I was contemplating whether this ribbon is good enough and whether you liked it. Or would that red one be better —"

"It's only a ribbon." Yin Qie Zi impatiently cut Litelli off. He took the ribbon and let his hair tie itself.

He then hesitated, but ordered Litelli, "Go buy some clothes for me today. Ones that are suitable for formal occasions, but also for going out."

Litelli's eyes immediately brightened at Yin Qie Zi's order. He quickly nodded. "No problem. Master, you can trust in me. The clothes I buy will definitely suit you the best!"

Litelli was never this obedient when he had actual business to do, but he couldn't be more compliant when it came to little things like buying clothes. Yin Qie Zi was left speechless by Litelli's excitement.

"What color would you like your clothes to be? I think the beige you have on is pretty good, but grey would also suit you well. What about forest green? There's also purple—"

"Shut up!"

"Yes!" *Then let's buy an outfit in every color!*

Yin Qie Zi looked up and down at Litelli, who appeared more cheerful than usual. Yin Qie Zi became very skeptical at this. He couldn't resist ordering, "I'm leaving first. After you're done buying clothes, go make some healing and support elixirs."

Contrary to expectations, Litelli didn't raise a single complaint at the dull and tedious job. Instead, he agreed readily.

Filled with suspicion, Yin Qie Zi walked out of the room, aiming to meet up with Owen and Mila.

Along the way, he passed by many servants and guards. Their glances lingered on him, some stunned by his appearance, and others mistrustful. He wanted to turn around and go back to his room to change, but he suppressed the urge. Yin



Qie Zi picked up his pace and walked quickly to the foyer.

Mila and Fenny were already waiting inside the foyer. Owen was never late, but he was never early either. Evidently, there were still a few minutes before their prearranged meeting time.

“Mila!”

Yin Qie Zi called out. Mila immediately turned her head around. She looked surprised, but then she revealed a brilliant smile. She didn’t bother hiding the pleasure in her eyes and kept glancing over Yin Qie Zi.

Her direct appreciation made Yin Qie Zi’s face heat up. He quickly explained, “I don’t have any other formal attire, so I can only wear this one.”

“You look very nice in this outfit!” Mila smiled and said, “This style suits you extremely well, though it is a little extravagant. But many members of the aristocracy dress extravagantly.”

When he saw Owen walking over dressed in a simple, blue military uniform, Yin Qie Zi once again regretted that he hadn’t insisted on wearing something normal. His clothes were more luxurious than that of the Warlord’s children. No, that wasn’t right. He remembered the last time he had seen Prince Edward, even the prince himself hadn’t been wearing something this extravagant. So he was dressed more extravagantly than the prince himself. If it was like this, what would other people think of him?

“I’ll go and change my clothes,” Yin Qie Zi said uneasily.

“Why do you need to change?” The moment Owen arrived, he heard Yin Qie Zi say he was going to change. He looked at his friend’s outfit. Wasn’t that his present? He quickly asked the question, thinking that there was something faulty with the clothes.

“You...” Yin Qie Zi stared at Owen, and then burst out, “Even Prince Edward doesn’t dress as extravagantly as I am right now!”

Mila and Owen shared a glance. Seeing that Yin Qie Zi was truly going to change, Owen quickly explained, “Wait, it’s because we are a military family! Besides military-styled formal attire, I’m not allowed to wear anything else. My father won’t agree to it. Prince Edward also deliberately dresses plain and

simple. He says it's because he wants to create an image of a hardworking and citizen-loving prince. But when it comes to a truly important occasion, he couldn't be more extravagant! Last time when we went to welcome the Danyas, his clothes were practically dripping with gemstones!"

Yin Qie Zi looked skeptically at Owen.

Owen immediately made a vow. "It's true, I swear on it. Otherwise, I can bring you to see Edward's wardrobe and jewel chests some other day."

*You're talking about the wardrobe and jewel chests of the First Prince! They probably aren't circuses for people to come see and admire, right?* Yin Qie Zi was at a loss of how to respond.

"Forget it. Let's go!"

Yin Qie Zi decided to give up on arguing. After hesitating a moment, he walked to Mila and grabbed the handles of her wheelchair. Though nobody came up to challenge him, he still politely asked, "Is it alright if I push your wheelchair?"

Mila was startled. Unfathomably, her face felt a bit hot. She couldn't even find the power to speak, so she nodded her head slightly in assent.

"Are we walking or taking the carriage?" Yin Qie Zi turned around and asked.

"The auction venue is pretty far away, so we've prepared a carriage. It's waiting outside," Fenny replied.

Yin Qie Zi nodded. Without consulting anyone, he pushed Mila out the door and to the carriage. He then lifted her out of her wheelchair. Mila let out a shout of alarm. He immediately stopped and peered down at her. He questioned puzzledly, "What's wrong? Are you uncomfortable being held like this?"

"N-no, I'm not... It's no-nothing..." Mila responded in a small voice.

Yin Qie Zi nodded. Holding Mila, he stepped into the carriage.

The two people who had been standing aside widened their eyes upon the scene. Owen turned to Fenny and quietly asked, "I was only late for five minutes, right? What is this degree of development in their relationship? Why does it feel like five days have passed since I saw them last? ...No, Yin Qie Zi's personality is quite cold. This amount of development has to have taken five months, right?"

Fenny bent slightly and whispered back, “Young Master, you’re the one who needs five months to develop a relationship to this stage. Miss Mila only needs five minutes.”

“...Hey!”

Yin Qie Zi stuck his head out of the carriage and called out, “Aren’t the two of you coming?”

Owen and Fenny jumped in surprise and quickly replied in unison, “Yes, we are!”

After all four of them were seated inside the carriage, Owen looked left and right, his eyes brightening when he saw that Yin Qie Zi had chosen to sit beside Mila. It was a four-person carriage and it just so happened that they had two women and two men. The most appropriate way for them to sit should have been for the men to take one side and the women the other. Though now, Yin Qie Zi and Mila were sitting on the same side.

This was inconceivable! Owen couldn’t even believe it. Did he really just miss out on five minutes?

Mila was also somewhat surprised. In her case though, it was because Yin Qie Zi’s movements were that of a perfect gentleman. Nothing ambiguous could be seen in his actions. But as she didn’t know Yin Qie Zi as well as Owen did, she quickly shook off her surprise. She started chatting casually, “Yin Qie Zi, have you ever gone to an auction before?”

Yin Qie Zi nodded and said, “I have been to many. There are many special spirits that are hard to get a hold of, so I usually go and try my luck at auctions.”

“Then are you lucky?”

Yin Qie Zi nodded again. “Normally, my luck is pretty good. The special spirits I usually buy aren’t popular merchandise, so their prices aren’t all that high. Like the powder of grazing beasts, it’s pretty cheap.”

Mila had never heard of this special spirit. She curiously asked, “What do you use the powder for?”

“It can be made into a strong coating film.”

“Then what do you use the film for?” Mila continued to ask confusedly.

“...There are many uses for it. For example, you can coat furniture with it. It'll give the furniture a shine and prevent them from becoming dirty.”

Yin Qie Zi was finding it a bit hard to continue. Truthfully, he primarily coated his hair with the film to prevent people from touching it. But even when his hair was coated with a protective film, he still disliked people touching it. At least it was better than having people touching his hair directly.

“So that's how it is!” Mila happily said, “Then I'll definitely have to order some from you.”

“I can bring some for you to try first...”

“Should I have not come at all?” Owen asked Fenny quietly. “I suddenly feel like I'm in the way, like a third wheel.”

Fenny nodded in agreement. “You definitely are in the way, like a third wheel.”

“...You are the same!”

Hearing Owen's words, Yin Qie Zi began to feel like he was focusing too much attention on Mila. He quickly turned to look at Owen and tried to strike up a conversation. “How come Yehv isn't coming today?”

Owen let out an “oh” and explained, “My father had some work for him to do.”

“Work? Isn't he only supposed to attend to you?”

A hesitant expression came on Owen's face when he heard the question. He looked as if he wanted to say something, but was holding himself back. “That...”

“Is it something you can't say?” Yin Qie Zi said with downcast eyes, “Then don't force yourself. It doesn't matter to me.”

Mila opened her mouth and explained, “Yehv was a subordinate of my father's in the past. He was injured in the war and ended up being in poor health for a long time. Because of that, my father made him attend to Owen instead. Yehv practically raised Owen himself.”

War? Yehv had been onto the battlefield? Yin Qie Zi became somewhat

panicked. If Yehv had been to war and was also a subordinate of West, then how could he not know about “Gong Hua?”

He continued acting calm even in his panic. In the guise of chatting, he began probing the situation. “So he had fought in the war before? He must have been a great help to Warlord Paladin. Isn’t it too much to reduce someone like him to a mere butler?”

Owen nodded and said, “That is true. At that time, Yehv was under a separate division of the army. He wasn’t a soldier under my father’s command. Moreover, he had gotten injured heavily not long after the war started, so he actually didn’t participate in many of the battles. My father making him take care of me is another way of letting him recuperate.”

Even if Yehv hadn’t participated in many battles, shouldn’t West have told him about the things that had happened back then? Then why had Yehv shown no reaction even though he had revealed he was a Flower? Could this be a trap?

“Yin Qie Zi, what are you thinking about?”

Yin Qie Zi looked up in shock and saw the other three staring at him. He calmly replied, “I was thinking of what kind of special spirits I’m missing from my stock, so I can bid on them later.”

Owen couldn’t resist complaining, “You are still thinking about spirit binder stuff? Can’t you think about the fact that we are going to be buying a Leaf later on?”

Yin Qie Zi stayed silent. He didn’t know whether he should accept a Leaf as a gift. Judging from his current situation, he wasn’t sure if he would be able to take care of a Leaf at all. But if someone else bought the Leaf, how would they treat it...

“Are you worried that the Leaf will expose your identity?” Mila softly asked.

Yin Qie Zi hesitated. It wasn’t because of that, but he still nodded in response. Otherwise, he’d have to find some other reason to explain. Besides, after Mila’s reminder, he truly began to worry about the problem of being exposed again.

Mila quickly consoled him, “Don’t worry, humans aren’t knowledgeable about the Leaf Tribe. Not many know of the Flower’s existence. Even if the Leaf

exposes you in front of everyone, probably none would understand.”

Hearing those words, Yin Qie Zi’s heart skipped a beat. Perhaps West didn’t know that he was a Flower? If it was like that, then Yehv wouldn’t know either. That was probably why Yehv paid no attention to his true identity. If that was the case, then that truly was good news!

“I think we should wait and see after we arrive at the venue. I don’t know how...I should face them.” Yin Qie Zi paused and said uneasily, “If I don’t want to buy the Leaf, then would it be possible...”

Yin Qie Zi couldn’t continue. He was the Guardian Flower and should be protecting the Leaves. Yet he had looked on at the Leaves locked up in the prison without lifting a finger. He had even tossed aside the Leaf he could have rescued. He’d already said that he had nothing to do with the Leaves since they had abandoned him. However, in his heart, he was incapable of acting like he was totally unrelated.

“Don’t worry.”

Yin Qie Zi looked up to see Mila smiling at him. The golden-haired girl had an oval-shaped face. Her cheeks were white and tender, and her bright and intelligent eyes were filled with smiles. He felt comfortable just by looking at her gentle, smiling face. More importantly, she didn’t ask anything else. Yin Qie Zi was relieved and gave out sincere words of thanks. “Thank you.”

On the side, Owen once again said quietly to Fenny, “I truly feel like we are in the way.”

Fenny gave him a stare. She lifted a finger to her mouth and gestured at Owen to be quiet. She then lowered her head and continued knitting.

Owen felt as if he had been wronged. “You can knit, but what can I do? I can’t possibly practice sword-fighting in the carriage, right?”

“You can practice being irritating in the carriage. After all, it’s what you are best at,” Yin Qie Zi said icily.

“ ... ”

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: PiKairi, Dinoj

# Chapter 4: The Xialan Flower...The Years That Were Filled with Plum-Colored Petals

I'm not Left Eye. I am Cas! Cas! I am Left... Cas!  
Time took away the shock of losing my family. Time took away the grief of my brother's tragic death. Time took away my hatred. Time took away everything...  
Then time can go to hell!  
I am Cas! Cas! Cas!  
Gong Hua, wait for me! I will definitely find you. I will hate you. I will make you suffer. I will destroy you, because Cas hates you to the bone, and I am Cas!

—Cas

The moment they arrived at the venue where the auction was being held, Yin Qie Zi immediately felt an urge to turn the carriage around and escape. He even started to resent Owen and Mila a bit for meddling in his business. He simply could not afford to keep a Leaf by his side. Whether it was the things he had done in the past or the things he was going to do in the future, he couldn't let the Leaves know about them!

Even though he wanted to leave, he found that he couldn't do it.

The venue was packed. Although there was a huge square in front of the auction house, every inch of it was filled with people. The streets were also lined with the carriages of the nobility. The numerous carriages followed closely on the heel of one another and were forced to stay in place due to the heavy traffic.

Yin Qie Zi had never seen this many people gathered at the auction house before. With that said, he previously did make an effort to avoid the days when the venue was packed. It allowed him to avoid the irritation of having to deal with a crowd. In any case, the things he bid on were never what other people wanted. He didn't need to fight with others for them.

Yin Qie Zi glanced out the carriage window. It seemed they had a while to wait before getting out. There were simply too many carriages waiting in line before them. Some of the nobles were already becoming restless and irritated, cursing



left and right. Some had even kicked their servants out of the carriage. The servants wore aggrieved expressions on their faces as they walked to the front of the line to check out the situation.

Yin Qie Zi then glanced at the two nobles in their carriage, one sitting adjacent from him and the other sitting beside him. Due to their titles, Owen and Mila were the most privileged out of all the nobles gathered here and thus were most entitled to cut through the line. If they ordered Fenny to go and inform the auction house, they could probably enter the venue immediately.

Mila appeared extremely excited. Her eyes widened as she glanced out the window at the long line of carriages. She exclaimed, "There's so many people!"

Owen then followed suit and also looked out the window. When he heard the cursing outside, he let out a "Ha" and remarked, "This voice definitely belongs to this War-Glaive or that Warrior." In high spirits, Owen began to eavesdrop on the various nobles as they cursed. Occasionally, he would click his tongue and comment on how he didn't know they were this well-versed in profanities and such.

In any case, it seemed Owen and Mila had no plans of taking advantage of their titles to enter the auction house sooner. Yin Qie Zi sighed in relief. At least now, he had some time to think of how he would face the Leaf later on.

Owen suddenly exclaimed in shock and turned around to face them. "I just saw Edward's carriage."

"Really?" Mila asked in surprise. "Didn't he say he couldn't come when you invited him?"

Owen shrugged and replied, "Yes, he said he wouldn't have time since he was responsible for entertaining the emissaries from Danya. Who knew he'd actually sneak out and come here?"

Mila was doubtful of her brother's words. She said in slight disbelief, "I don't think so. His Highness is never lazy when it comes to his responsibilities."

Fenny put down her yarn and asked tentatively, "Could it be that the emissaries wanted to come to the auction and His Highness brought them here in his carriage?"

At her suggestion, Owen and Mila finally stopped speculating. There was a very high possibility that Fenny's suggestion was true.

Mila nodded and added, "They *are* auctioning off a Leaf today. Most likely, the Danyas have come to bid on the Leaf."

Yin Qie Zi froze in shock and asked puzzledly, "Do the Danyas like the Leaves?"

Owen nodded in response. "Yes, that's why our peace offerings mostly consist of Leaves. We've already been gifting Leaves to them for several years. They also have merchants who bring Leaves to Xia Sha for them. Judging from that, I can say they've bought most of the Leaves in Xi Zong. I've heard they have at least two thousand Leaves living in their country."

*Two thousand Leaves?* Yin Qie Zi was shocked. He asked in disbelief, "Why do they like the Leaves so much?"

When he heard this question, Owen was reminded of Yin Qie Zi's true identity. He replied a bit uneasily, "Even if you ask me, I wouldn't know. I've only heard they like Leaves and that they've spent a great amount of effort amassing all the Leaves from Xi Zong. Other than that, I'm not very sure."

Seeing Owen's frantic expression, Yin Qie Zi understood that he shouldn't pursue the question. He merely nodded and gazed quietly at the chaos outside. Occasionally, he would glance at the prince's carriage, thinking that the Danya with gold-streaked hair might be sitting inside. What did the Danya call himself again? Right, his name was Jin Qi Er. Maybe he knew Indigo?

"Ah?" Mila leaned forward and pulled on Owen's sleeve. "Owen, look at that carriage over there. Doesn't it belong to Commander Chris? It has Zhan Yan's coat of arms and the Xialan Spiritmancer Regiment's insignia on it. It should be Commander Chris' carriage right?"

"It really is! What's up with everyone today?" Owen shouted in fright, "What is Teacher doing at an auction? I never knew he came to these kinds of places."

Mila quickly assured him, "Maybe it's not him. Other members of his family could have borrowed his carriage to come, like his wife perhaps."

Owen's furrowed brow relaxed. If not for Mila's suggestion, he'd have thought that his teacher only showed up because all the other nobles in Zhan Yan

seemed to be gathering at the auction.

“If we continue waiting like this, we probably won’t reach the venue even after the auction has started.” Fenny directed her question at Mila, “Why don’t I go and arrange for them to let us in?”

Mila nodded in assent.

*Fenny is leaving?* Yin Qie Zi was alarmed at the sudden turn of events. His heart began to pound rapidly.

If Fenny were to leave, then only Owen, Mila, and he would be left on the carriage. His injured shoulder would slow his attacking speed, but Owen wasn’t prepared to guard against him at all. If he attacked suddenly, he could probably kill Owen with one hit.

After he killed Owen, then all Mila could do would be to wait for her own death.

Should he make a move?

Fenny poked her head out and spoke a few words to the coachman. She then turned around and smiled. “It’s already done. I’ve asked the coachman to talk to His Highness and ask him to bring us along with him.”

“Oh, Edward truly has his uses,” Owen said and laughed loudly.

Yin Qie Zi hid his right hand behind his back. He clenched his fist tightly and glanced out the window. He maintained a cool expression on his face and slowly felt himself calming down. He’d never expected to have the chance to make a move at this moment, so it wasn’t considered a failure for him. He had only returned to his original plan.

Not long after, the carriage finally moved from its spot. The nobles around them stuck their heads out one after another. Irritation could be seen on their faces, but when they saw that the moving carriage belonged to the royal family, they quickly disguised their anger. They had also noticed that the carriage following behind Prince Edward’s didn’t belong to the royal family, but upon the sight of the Paladin family crest, they didn’t dare show even a hint of their irritation.

Many of the nobles glanced curiously at Yin Qie Zi. For the most part, they only stared at his hair and then curiously speculated on his identity.

Yin Qie Zi quickly noticed that many people were staring at him. He immediately drew the curtains across the window and turned to face the inside of the carriage. Coincidentally, his eyes met Mila's.

Slightly worried, she asked, "Do you dislike crowded places? Do you want to go home first? We can let Owen go in by himself to buy the Leaf. We'll return home first, is that alright?"

Yin Qie Zi was silent for a moment. He then quietly explained, "We don't need to go back. I had acted purely on instinct just now. In the past, I was afraid people would see through me and notice that I was different, that I wasn't human. I avoided crowded places because of that. But there's nothing to worry about now. I should look like any other human, right?"

He looked at Mila and then at Owen. The two quickly nodded their heads, their movements exactly the same. Only now did they look like a pair of twins. Yin Qie Zi looked at the two's same expression and couldn't resist laughing.

"You laughed! You actually laughed! How rare!" Owen started yelling, making big deal out of it.

Yin Qie Zi immediately stopped laughing and started glaring fiercely at Owen. After hesitating a moment, he pulled the curtains aside and glanced out again. It was simply too dark inside the carriage with the curtains drawn.

Unexpectedly, when he opened the curtains, he found they had already arrived at the door of the auction house. Over a dozen guards stood in two rows, currently welcoming the guests on the royal carriage. The first to step out was Prince Edward.

As Fenny had surmised, the guests accompanying the prince were the Danya emissaries. The minute the Danyas stepped out, Yin Qie Zi could hear a round of gasps in the crowd. The Danyas were simply too eye-catching.

As their average height was around two meters, they stood over the rest of the crowd by at least a head. Their bodies were slim and fit. Most of them had a head of luscious, long hair. Their most striking and unique feature, however, was

their hair color. On top of the white base, their hair was streaked with large amounts of gold, with small amounts of blue, red, and black mixed in.

There were four Danyas in total, but only one of them had hair with purely gold streaks. He walked ahead of everyone else, appearing to be the leader of the small group. It was Jin Qi Er, the Danya Yin Qie Zi had seen on the night of the attack at the palace.

“Owen!”

Owen was the first one to step down from the carriage. Yin Qie Zi followed after him and gave a strange look at Fenny, who was still sitting inside. She seemed to have no plans to help Mila disembark from the carriage. She simply sat with a girlish smile on her face, appearing like a weak and powerless girl once again.

Yin Qie Zi felt a bit helpless and tried to explain, “There’s a lot of people here. It probably won’t be appropriate for me to lift Mila out.”

From his understanding of human culture, it was extremely inappropriate for a man to hold an unwed girl in his arms in front of a crowd, especially when the prince, a regiment commander, and foreign diplomats were there as witnesses. He might end up being dragged away by the guards if he dared to do such a thing!

Fenny merely blinked innocently at his words. “But I’m not strong enough to lift the young mistress from the carriage.”

Why did she appear so natural while lying? It was as if she believed in her lie. Yin Qie Zi suddenly felt very tired and helpless.

“Fenny, stop fooling around.” With a red face, Mila said quietly, “Yin Qie Zi is right. There are too many people here. It would be extremely inappropriate for him to help me down.”

“Miss, why are you saying that too? I’m truly not strong enough to lift you.” Once she finished speaking, Fenny quickly slipped out of the carriage. She turned around and said, “I will go prepare your wheelchair.”

“Fenny!” Mila exclaimed in shock, but her maid had already walked to the back of the carriage.

*The wheelchair is probably heavier than Mila*, Yin Qie Zi thought. He sighed lightly and asked, “Mila, is it okay for me to lift you down?”

“So-sorry!” Mila quickly replied, the shame apparent on her face. “You can just leave me here. I just don’t believe that Fenny and Owen will leave me here alone and go in by themselves!”

Yin Qie Zi gazed at Mila silently. He didn’t know if she was telling the truth or if she was merely making an excuse. If he really did as she asked, she might be angry with him instead. He had come across several people in the past who would make excuses but weren’t truly rejecting his help.

Mila, however, repeated in a firm voice, “Really, you can just leave me here! Don’t worry. It’s all because of Owen and Fenny. They’ve gone too far this time.”

Yin Qie Zi closely examined Mila’s expression. Not a bit of hesitation could be seen on her face, only determination. He could see she wasn’t making an excuse to let him leave. He smiled and said, “If Prince Edward ever blames me for this, you’ll have to help me out and say it’s all Owen’s fault.”

“Eh?”

Mila stared at him in shock and felt herself being lifted in one swift motion. Startled, she cried out in alarm at the sudden movement. She quickly grabbed hold of the nearest thing to stabilize herself. When she noticed she had grabbed onto Yin Qie Zi’s head, she cried out again. She quickly released her hold and quietly apologized in a sheepish voice, “So-sorry.”

Yin Qie Zi merely grunted in response. Although he was trying his best to maintain his calm, he couldn’t restrain the blush that rose up on his cheeks. Mila had just grabbed onto his head. When they’d left for the auction, he hadn’t bothered coating his hair with the powder of grazing beasts. His hair had been touched directly, without any protection at all. He felt...something he couldn’t bear to describe.

“Yin Qie Zi, Yin Qie Zi, you can put me down.”

When he felt his chest being patted, Yin Qie Zi finally regained his senses. He was still holding onto Mila. Fenny, who stood at the side with the wheelchair, was secretly laughing to herself. The crowd around them was quiet, so quiet that

it was abnormal. He couldn't resist glancing at the people around them. He saw that every single person had their eyes on him and Mila. The prince, the Danya emissaries, various nobles, and even the guards were all quietly staring at them with wide eyes.

Owen was so shocked that his jaw was hanging almost all the way down to his chest.

When he saw they were the center of attention, Yin Qie Zi was so embarrassed that he didn't dare to look around anymore. He quickly withdrew his eyes and lowered his head to avoid other people's gazes. With his head lowered, however, he immediately noticed that Mila's face was flushed red. Even the tips of her ears were red due to her embarrassment. Her head was lowered so much that her face couldn't be seen.

“...”

In one breath, Yin Qie Zi placed Mila onto her wheelchair and quickly pushed her into the auction house without looking back. Fenny pulled up her skirts and ran after them, barely managing to keep up.

After they entered the auction house, Yin Qie Zi pushed Mila toward the great hall without pausing. Only once they were inside the hall did he finally stop to breathe. At that moment, the crowd outside suddenly burst into thunderous laughter. Even though they were quite a distance away from the entrance, they could still hear the laughter loud and clear.

Yin Qie Zi had an urge to bash his head against a wall and die.

“Don't worry Yin Qie Zi. Y-you didn't actually do anything. You were just staring in a daze for a little.”

Yin Qie Zi lifted his head and looked at her. Mila's face was still as red as an apple, but she was trying her best to reassure him.

Seeing this, he made an effort to pull himself together. He looked straight into Mila's eyes and apologized, “I'm sorry. I've embarrassed you just now.”

Faced with Yin Qie Zi's gaze, Mila lowered her head. She mumbled, “Actually, I didn't feel all that embarrassed.”

As Mila had her head bowed, Yin Qie Zi could only see her golden hair from where he was standing. This was the best, however, as their faces were so red that it seemed they were about to spew out blood from embarrassment. If they held each other's gazes for any longer, Yin Qie Zi would probably truly turn around and escape.

"Sir, may I ask if you need me to take you to your seats?"

Pretending to be unperturbed, Yin Qie Zi turned to look at the person who had spoken. It was a young man, dressed in servant's garb with a smile on his face. Yin Qie Zi hadn't quite caught what he had said and asked, "What did you just say?"

The attendant respectfully repeated his question, "Would you like me to lead you to your seats? If I could have your admission tickets, if you please."

Yin Qie Zi frowned at his words. Seeing this, the attendant dared not probe the matter further. Judging from Yin Qie Zi's luxurious outfit, he knew the latter wasn't someone to provoke. Even if Yin Qie Zi didn't have an admission ticket, the most he could do was respectfully ask him to purchase them right now.

"I have the admission tickets here."

Out of nowhere, Fenny came up and handed several tickets to the waiting young man. He accepted them and immediately praised himself for his foresight. The tickets were for the box seats reserved especially for distinguished guests. Only the highest ranked nobility were able to afford these tickets. From the first impression, he'd thought the young master with silvery-purple hair had an extraordinary air about him. He definitely came from an old and distinguished family.

The young man gave a ninety-degree bow and said reverently, "Please follow me."

Yin Qie Zi hesitated for a moment, but willingly went forward to push Mila's wheelchair. Mila lowered her head shyly in response. Fenny laughed to herself all the while by the side. Even though Yin Qie Zi continuously gave her pointed stares, it didn't stop her laughter.

The young man led the three of them to their box seats, which had an



excellent view of the stage as it was situated just to the right of it. The angle the box was built in also blocked curious glances from other attendees. They were seats that offered privacy and a good view.

After they were seated, the attendant busied about serving them fruits and drinks. Yin Qie Zi picked up his drink and took a forceful gulp. Fenny merely sat in her seat peeling a fruit for Mila to eat. All three of them were silent, feeling awkward... Rather, only two of them felt awkward. Fenny wasn't the slightest bit awkward. Instead she smiled, appearing to be in a good mood. Her good mood, however, made it harder for the other two to restrain the blushes that were spreading over their faces.

Not long after, Owen came into the box, followed by a man who looked around forty years old. The man was dressed in an outfit that resembled a military uniform. His face was angular and his eyebrows also slanted upwards in sharp angles. His whole person exuded energy and an air of capability.

Yin Qie Zi immediately recognized the man. The other hadn't changed much from the past. There were more wrinkles around his eyes and between his brows. His body also wasn't as robust as before. However, compared to how West's appearance had changed, he truly didn't change much. Yin Qie Zi knew who he was at first glance...

He was the commander of the Xialan Spiritmancer Regiment—Zhan · Chris · Wollier

Although Chris was one of the people who were aware of Gong Hua's existence, Yin Qie Zi wasn't especially worried. Even West hadn't recognized him, not to mention Chris, who had known him for a much shorter time.

Thinking about the past, they never truly cared about his appearance. All that was important to them was that he wielded a formidable power.

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The entire Racing Flames regiment had been beaten miserably.

Chakou had fallen into the enemy's hands. Alfven Xi Jiang's whereabouts were currently unknown. The zong jiang of the Right Division was missing. In the end, it was a zong xiao who took charge of the remaining troops and ordered a

retreat. With the Danyas hot on their tails, the battered army crossed the Eastern Zhan River and successfully rendezvoused with the Xialan Regiment that was coming for their assistance.

The Racing Flames originally consisted of ninety-thousand soldiers. After the battles at the Zangxia Gates and Chakou, however, only thirty-thousand soldiers remained. This news came as a shock to the king and the nobility residing in Qifeng, finally awakening them to the reality of the war.

For his meritorious conduct of saving thirty-thousand soldiers, West Zong Xiao was to be directly promoted to zong jiang and the temporary commander of the Racing Flames Regiment.

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Zhandong City, the city lord's residence.

"I am Zhan · Chris · Wollier. The zong jiang of the Xialan Regiment's Central Division."

A robust figure walked in and introduced himself before saying anything else.

West was drinking a glass of water. When he heard the other's rank, he immediately stood up and saluted. He then introduced himself, "Zong Jiang, I am Zhan · West · Paladin, the zong xiao of the Racing Flames Regiment's Left Division."

"You won't stay as zong xiao for long." Chris stated concisely, "Fifty-thousand additional soldiers will be assigned to the Racing Flames. The Racing Flames will then join the Xialan Regiment in holding back the Danya army. The xi jiang of the Xialan Regiment has already reported to the higher officials. He wants you to lead the Racing Flames."

Chris did not mention the xi jiang's name, but most of the public knew the xi jiang also had the surname Wollier. He was Chris' father. The majority of people assumed that the only reason Chris could be promoted to the position of zong jiang in such a short time was because of his familial ties with the commander. After meeting the man though, West did not think that was the case.

Chris' back was straight and powerful. He spoke in a concise manner and always had on a strict and self-restrained expression, but his eyes were full of

spirit. His whole person exuded a feeling of a sword that could be swiftly drawn at any given moment. He was a model soldier from head to toe.

Noticing West was looking him over, Chris relaxed his expression a bit and gestured for West to sit. He sat down first and poured himself a glass of water. When West was seated, he finally opened his mouth and started chatting as if they were having a normal conversation. "It must have been difficult to protect and lead thirty-thousand soldiers in that kind of situation. I deeply admire you for it."

West's heart gave a lurch and he quickly said, "You are being too kind. What happened in the past is not important, what is important at this moment, is how we will push back the Danyas. They are powerful, much more powerful than we've expected. They are not the simple barbarians we have made them out to be. They are strong opponents. Even their most basic one-handed swords are larger than our own. They will not be easy to defeat."

"That is significant information." Chris asked in detail, "How many of our soldiers would it take to hold back one Danya?"

West calmly analyzed and spoke, "We had been caught unprepared in Chakou. Due to our continuous losses, our soldiers are afraid to go into battle. Adding on the Danya's high morale, I'm afraid even four or five of our soldiers won't be able to hold back one of them. However, in normal circumstances, I think around three or even two of our soldiers should be able to stop one of them."

"Do they have siege weapons?"

Feeling a bit embarrassed, West replied, "I know they have siege-engines. As for other weapons... since we had been caught unprepared, I didn't see much of anything else." He paused there, unable to continue. The battle at Chakou had been so shameful that he'd rather have died in the city.

Although he was unable to obtain any further information, Chris did not look disappointed. He only nodded and said, "No matter what, His Majesty the King has already given his order: We must not allow the Danyas to cross the Eastern Zhan River!"

West's expression changed when he heard those words. The length of the Eastern Zhan River was twice that of the Cha River. Even if they disregarded the

northern section that wound around an impassable mountain range, a large section of the river still remained. To guard such a long distance and prevent the Danyas from breaking in was one word: impossible.

Chris had an ugly expression on his face. He knew pulling off such a task would be difficult. Despite that, they were soldiers. If the king commanded them to guard the river, then they could only obey.

Seeing Chris' expression, West decided to not linger on the topic. The two of them continued chatting about the upcoming battle. They sighed and felt troubled by the king's impossible command, but didn't complain any further. Was there truly a battle they couldn't afford to lose? West himself had said they couldn't afford to lose Chakou, but what about now?

"What are Yi Shuang, Dashi, and Linlan's views on this situation? The Danyas have already penetrated into Xi Zong. Do they still plan to observe without lifting a finger?"

Chris replied unenthusiastically, "Dashi has agreed to send troops to help defend Zu Gang. We still don't know about the other two countries."

Anger rose up in West the minute he heard Chris' response. "Zu Gang is a port we've lent to Dashi for their personal use. What do they mean by sending out troops to 'help' defend it? They should do so in any case!"

Chris shook his head and said, "Calm down. Our own country only started taking this war seriously after the Racing Flames had been defeated. How would it be different for countries that haven't suffered any losses at all?"

West was taken aback by the other's words. Chris was younger than him by several years, yet he remained calm throughout the conversation. Unexpectedly, it was an old man like him who felt agitated about the whole affair.

"Well, why don't we stop here? West Zong Xiao, you should turn in early today. Perhaps tomorrow you will be known as West Zong Jiang. We still have many things to do in the following days. Everything is for the people of Zhan Yan. We fight for them!"

Finished speaking, Chris turned around and left. Looking at Chris' resolute back, West felt a bit ashamed of himself. The other man was still young, yet he

was already a good soldier who thought only of his people and his country. In contrast, an old man like him was hiding something important from his own countrymen. It was perhaps the secret weapon that could guard the Eastern Zhan River against the Danyas.

“Please wait!”

“...What is it?”

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Owen was sitting in front of a tent. The tent was located in a remote corner of the barracks, so few people passed by him, but the ones who did frowned at his unkempt appearance. Even if those soldiers frowned at him, they did not have the energy to care about other people’s business. Owen had no plans to change locations or tidy up his appearance either, he merely sat, dejected, on the ground.

“Owen.”

Hearing his name, Owen finally came back to himself. He saw West walking towards him. His cousin looked left and right before saying quietly, “We’ll go in and talk.”

“We can’t, Gong Hua is taking a bath inside.” Owen sighed deeply and said, “Her whole body is covered with blood. She hasn’t had time to bathe ever since we’ve escaped from Chakou. Why don’t you just say what you want here?”

West was quiet for a moment. He then said, “The war is going to start again. New soldiers have been assigned to the Racing Flames. We will assist the Xialan Regiment in the task of guarding the whole Eastern Zhan River.”

Owen jumped up when he heard the last sentence. An “Impossible” leapt out of his mouth. Then he yelled in disbelief, “Guard the whole river? Don’t you know how long the Eastern Zhan River is? How is it possible for us to guard the entire river?”

Of course West understood how ridiculous the whole ordeal was. He helplessly said, “The higher officials said that it is currently harvest season on the Old Zhan Plains. If we let the Danyas break in and plunder our land, we’ll certainly suffer a famine the coming year. We definitely can’t allow the Danyas to cross the

Eastern Zhan River.”

Owen roared furiously, “They would’ve already crossed it if not for Gong Hua. If she weren’t there at the time, the Danyas would’ve already taken Zhandong City. There wouldn’t even be an Eastern Zhan River for us to guard!”

West was fell silent for a second and then replied, “That’s why we need her.”

Owen was startled. He understood what West was implying.

“You want to turn Gong Hua into a weapon?”

West furrowed his brows, but still nodded in the end.

“She’s only a girl!” Owen yelled.

West didn’t have the same opinion as Owen. In his mind, the strength and power Gong Hua possessed was far from what a girl should have.

“I definitely won’t agree to this!” Owen grabbed a fistful of West’s clothes, completely disregarding that West was his older cousin. He only yelled exasperatedly, “When we escaped from Chakou, do you know how many Danyas Gong Hua killed for us? If it weren’t for her, we would’ve died in that city! If she hadn’t stayed at the back of the army and prevented the Danyas from chasing us, do you really think thirty-thousand soldiers could have escaped all the way to Zhandong? Did you forget all she has done for us? I’ll look past it if you simply don’t know how to be thankful, but now you want her to kill more people?”

West grabbed Owen’s hands and glared fiercely at him. He widened his eyes and gritted out, “If we don’t protect Zhandong, then girls younger than her will die by the Danyas’ hands! Even if they survive by some chance, they’ll die on the road due to shortage of food! Don’t you understand this?”

Owen was taken aback.

“Zhan Yan is my country. It’s also yours. Not to mention girls, I would even use *infants* as weapons to protect my country! Do you still call yourself a soldier? Owen!”

Owen was rendered speechless by his cousin’s reprimand. Since long ago, he had already stopped considering himself as a soldier. Would a soldier shield a murderer? Would a soldier escape with a murderer? Would a soldier k-ki...kill his

own teammate?

He did not intend to argue with West on those points. He merely stated in a cold voice, "Gong Hua won't obediently listen to you and kill people. She doesn't like killing. It's useless to reason with her, as she doesn't understand what reason is at all."

West frowned and said, "She's already killed that many Danyas. I don't see how she's unwilling."

"That's because the Danyas were chasing after us!" Distraught, Owen said, "Whenever I am in danger, Gong Hua would lose her senses. She would go into a frenzy and kill everything that tries to come near me!"

A thoughtful expression appeared on West's face when he heard Owen's explanation. Owen gazed at him suspiciously, already regretting that he hadn't listen to Gong Hua's words, or rather Mila's words. Mila had wanted Gong Hua to leave Zhan Yan. Thinking about it now, that was probably what they should've done in the beginning.

But Owen wasn't capable of abandoning everything and escaping to a foreign country. Especially when Zhan Yan was experiencing a calamity, he definitely couldn't leave during the war!

West smiled and said lightly, "That's simple. The battlefields are full of dangerous places. As a soldier, going into the battlefield is your duty."

Owen was stunned, but quickly understood what West was planning. West was going to send him into the battlefield, not for fighting... but to force Gong Hua to kill!

Owen paled at this revelation, but West disregarded him, he had already made up his mind. If Gong Hua only killed when Owen was in danger, then he would send Owen into battle!

Publicly, West was being this harsh because they needed to protect the Eastern Zhan River at all costs. Otherwise, the streets of this city would be turned into rivers of blood. Privately, it was because the Danyas had already killed many of his brothers-in-arms. Even Yehv's whereabouts were unknown. He didn't even know if Yehv had died in Chakou. How could he not hate the Danyas?

*I'll make these monsters fight to the death amongst themselves!*

“West, is your conversation finished? I still have many things to do. I can't afford to wait too long.”

Owen was so frightened at the stranger's voice that he almost jumped up. How long had the man been listening to their conversation?

“Don't be agitated. This is Zhan · Chris · Wollier, the zong jiang of the Xialan Regiment's Central Division.”

Owen stared in surprise as the man in question approached them. Chris was dressed in a military uniform and looked around to be his age, but the medal hanging from his uniform indeed identified him as a zong jiang.

Owen had heard of Chris, as he was one the most famous soldiers among Zhan Yan's army. His father was a xi jiang, plus his own promotions were the fastest ever recorded. Both praises and criticisms surrounded his character. Some claimed he was a model soldier, while others claimed his promotions had been due to his father's connections.

It didn't matter what Chris' true character was, what exactly was West trying to accomplish by bringing him here? It had only been a few days when they had decided to conceal Gong Hua's existence as much as possible to prevent needless trouble. After all, Owen and Gong Hua were still wanted criminals.

“Owen...”

Owen turned around and saw Gong Hua standing timidly in the tent's opening, only exposing one side of her body. She was already dressed, but as she had not sponged off the water on her body before dressing, half of her clothes were wet.

“A woman?” Chris frowned and asked severely, “Why is there a woman in the barracks? This is an action that can put you on trial for violating army decree. Did you bring her here knowing that?”

West quickly explained, “Her name is Gong Hua. She's the secret weapon I was telling you about. It was due to her that the thirty-thousand soldiers of the Racing Flames managed to survive.”

*Due to her?* Chris furrowed his brows and looked over Gong Hua. Her



appearance and height indicated that she was a woman, but the expression in her eyes made her seem like an underage girl instead. A carpet of wet black hair draped over her body, some stray strands sticking to her cheeks. There were holes in her sleeves and skirt. A normal girl definitely would not allow herself to be seen in such a state. It didn't take much observation to see that she was filled with fear. How was a frightened girl such as her able to protect thirty-thousand soldiers?

Chris glanced doubtfully at West, the furrow between his brows deepening to three lines.

At the same time, West also felt a bit awkward. He didn't know how to prove his words. Even if he told Gong Hua to demonstrate her power, she probably wouldn't even listen. Would she do it if Owen were to ask instead?

He turned to look at Owen, suddenly stumbling upon an idea. He pulled out his sword and pointed it at Owen, even brandishing it a few times for good measure.

Seeing this, Gong Hua ran out of the tent and wedged herself between him and Owen. Countless vines exploded out of the ground, moving like snakes and dancing wildly in the air.

Chris, who had remained quiet this whole time, widened his eyes at the display.

"Gong Hua, stop!" Frightened, Owen immediately grabbed Gong Hua and repeatedly shouted at her to stop. With great difficulty, he managed to control Gong Hua's instinct to kill. Finally feeling it was safe enough to look away, he turned to West and roared, "Why did you do such a stupid thing? Don't you know Gong Hua could've killed you just now?"

West was taken aback, suddenly realizing how stupid he'd been. He had seen the vines' attack many times now. If Gong Hua had acted a second faster or if Owen had reacted a second slower, he would've been sent flying or pierced by the vines. At that thought, cold sweat streamed down his back.

Standing at the side, Chris couldn't resist and walked up to get a closer look at the vines. Gong Hua immediately turned her head and stared at him with her blood-red eyes. If he dared to pull out his sword, then he'd be speared by the vines faster than West would have been.

As a soldier, Chris knew how to suppress his fear in front of enemies. The enemy in front of him at the moment was different from all the others he had encountered before. She looked pure, yet dangerous. She stood with spread arms in front of Owen, her pair of blood-red eyes staring straight at West and Chris. Her entire attitude seemed to send out a message—*If you don't want to die, then don't you dare raise a hand against Owen.*

There was no room for negotiation with an enemy like this. The only way to survive was to refrain from harming her object of protection. Chris felt his whole body go rigid, his hands heavy like stones.

West misunderstood the reason for his silence and quickly explained, “The vines aren’t only this size. I’ve seen ones that were five meters in diameter and perhaps even that isn’t her limit. The killing power of these vines is also astonishing. Even if they are just moving on the ground, they can crush people underneath them. If we make these vines crawl over the battlefield a few times, we can completely destroy the Danyas’ morale.”

Let vines that go up to five meters in diameter crawl over the battlefield? Chris didn’t know how to respond to that idea. In a hoarse voice, he asked, “What did you say her name was?”

“Gong Hua.”

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: PiKairi, Dinoj

# Chapter 5: To Send Out...Weapons or Medicine?

Since I'm not given a choice, I'll become the king's dog, but I don't need any remunerations.

I only need two things.

One: I will be allowed to continue to accept jobs from the guild.

Two: I will be allowed to use the king's name to gather information.

If I use an entire country's power to search for you, I should at least be able to find out where you are, right?

Gong Hua...

—Cas

"Teacher, this is Yin Qie Zi." Owen hurriedly went forward and introduced them to each other. "Yin Qie Zi, this is my teacher Zhan · Chris · Wollier."

Owen was a little bit anxious after the introductions. Yin Qie Zi had a cold personality and disliked strangers. He was afraid Yin Qie Zi would be unhappy that he had brought a stranger into their box. But Chris was his teacher, he was obligated to greet him. He only hoped that even if Yin Qie Zi was unhappy, he wouldn't stare at Chris with a cold expression on his face.

Contrary to Owen's expectations, Yin Qie Zi stood up and said politely, "This is the first time we've met. Hello."

Chris merely nodded in response. He walked up to Mila and a rare smile came over his serious face.

Mila greeted him first, "Uncle Chris! Long time no see. Really, it's just so like you to not even attend our birthday banquet! Not many people were invited in the first place."

Chris smiled and replied, "West usually doesn't pay attention to people, but if I were to go, he would certainly come over and greet me. He'd finally managed to pull out some time and spend it together with you, I'd rather not waste those minutes."

Mila pouted and protested, “Really! I wouldn’t mind if you took some of our time and came over to say hello!”

At that moment, Owen walked up to Yin Qie Zi and whispered in his ear, “Teacher is pretty indifferent to people. He’s not deliberately ignoring you. Don’t take it to heart!”

Yin Qie Zi didn’t mind at all. He knew what Chris was like. Twenty years ago, Chris had barely spoken a word to him... In retrospect, they had probably never spoken to each other at all.

“Well, have you looked at the Leaf’s listing yet?”

Yin Qie Zi paused and asked back, “Listing?”

“The auction’s catalog has information on the goods that are being sold. Let’s see.” Owen glanced around and exclaimed, “There, it’s on the table!”

Owen picked up the catalog and flipped through it. He quickly found the page he was looking for. He read out loud, “Leaf. Bright, white skin. Pleasant features. Healthy body with no defects. Blue hair. Height is 175 centimeters... That tall? Don’t tell me the Leaf really is male?”

Yin Qie Zi rolled his eyes at Owen and responded, “Not necessarily. Leaves are quite similar in height as there aren’t any sex-related differences between males and females. Even if they stood in front of you, you probably wouldn’t be able to tell which one is male or female.”

“So that’s how it is!” Owen understood and continued reading, “Has spirit charmer abilities. Gentle, won’t attack without reason... They’ve written this much, but there’s nothing on the Leaf’s sex.”

Before Yin Qie Zi could reply, Mila cut in, “What are you worried about? The Leaf isn’t for you in any case.”

Owen muttered, “How does that have nothing to do with me? The Leaf is going to live at our house, right? At the minimum, I want a visually pleasing... Alright, don’t glare at me. The Leaf is definitely male. Happy?”

“You are planning on buying the Leaf?” Chris asked suddenly.

Mila and Owen both turned to look at Chris. Owen nodded and said yes, he

then asked curiously, “Teacher, what did you come here to buy? Weapons?”

“The Leaf.”

Owen was shocked upon hearing that answer. He hadn’t expected Chris to be after the Leaf as well. “Teacher, you’re planning to buy the Leaf too? What do you plan on doing with the Leaf, make them into a spirit charmer?”

Chris thought for a bit and replied, “There’s no harm done even if I don’t buy it. After you two have bought it, it’ll be fine if you let me borrow it for a few days.”

If it had been anyone else saying those words, Owen would have already punched them in the face. But it had been Chris, the commander of the Xialan Spiritmancer Regiment. He was known for his strict self-discipline both inside and outside their country. Whenever someone talked about the paragon of discipline and strict values, the commander of the Xialan Regiment would come up nine out of ten times.

Exactly what was a commander like Chris planning on doing by borrowing a Leaf for a few days? Even if Owen wanted to think of a decent and honest reason, he couldn’t come up with one. If his teacher wanted to turn the Leaf into a spirit charmer, exactly what could he hope to accomplish in just a few days? Besides, Zhan Yan wasn’t lacking strong spirit charmers. With Chris’ authority as a commander, he could easily have a few strong ones transferred over to him. Why would he need to borrow a Leaf?

Owen refused to believe that it was because Chris coveted the Leaves’ beauty. He’d rather believe that his teacher was going to bring the Leaf home and make it into a delicious meal.

“I have some questions I want to ask the Leaf.” Noticing Owen and Mila’s strange expressions, Chris offered a short explanation.

Owen and Mila were still doubtful; Yin Qie Zi had also caught onto a slight hint of danger in Chris’ answer. The topic that was most relevant to the Leaves would be information on the Flower.

Chris looked at Owen and explained in a coaching voice, “The Danyas are obsessed with the Leaves. Even though they’ve already received ten Leaves as

peace offerings, they've actually requested to come to the auction to bid on another one. I want to understand the reason why they are so obsessed with the Leaves."

Owen understood, but then asked puzzledly, "Isn't it because the Leaves' beautiful appearances are well-suited to their tastes?"

"I don't believe it's that simple." Chris frowned and said, "According to our investigation, Xi Zong once had around 2000 registered Leaf slaves. Nowadays, the number of Leaves still in Xi Zong doesn't even amount to 20. All the others had been bought by the Danyas. They had paid prices much higher than the market value to forcefully obtain most of those Leaves. A simple infatuation with the Leaves' appearances doesn't explain the Danya's stubborn attachment to them."

Chris suddenly paused and turned to his student. In a serious voice, he said, "Owen, you need to remember, even if we are in a period of peace, our greatest enemies are the Danyas! Although we have once successfully pushed back their invasion, it doesn't mean we will win against them next time! You always have to treat them as your enemies!"

Owen wasn't the slightest bit surprised. Chris' hatred for the Danyas wasn't any news to him. He quickly straightened and replied, "Yes!"

Owen then motioned with a hand. "Teacher, please sit."

"You don't need to mind me," Chris said while shaking his head. "I'll leave after I take a look around. You can go attend to that friend of yours."

"Haha! What are you talking about, Teacher? I don't need to attend to him. He can take care of himself."

While laughing, Owen turned around to look. Sure enough, Yin Qie Zi had already sat down and was minding his own business. Owen didn't know whether to smile or become angry at the sight. Even in front of the commander of the Xialan Regiment, Yin Qie Zi hadn't bothered changing his attitude. He was exactly like a cold and arrogant prince who disliked associating with others. On the other hand, the actual prince of Zhan Yan, Prince Edward, wasn't the least bit cold or arrogant.

Mila immediately wheeled herself towards Yin Qie Zi and started chatting with him. She didn't want him to seem too aloof and arrogant. Otherwise, he would leave a bad impression on Chris.

In reality, Chris had already taken notice of Yin Qie Zi. It was hard for people to ignore that head of silvery-purple hair. What Chris had focused on, however, was Yin Qie Zi's eyes. That pair of red eyes...

He frowned and asked Yin Qie Zi, "Why are your eyes red?"

Yin Qie Zi was startled by the question. Usually, people would ask about his hair color. They never mentioned his red eyes. Against all his expectations, Chris just had to pay attention to his eyes!

He pretended to be unperturbed and replied, "I have Leaf ancestry."

Chris' frown deepened at those words. Just when he was about to ask in detail, the door to the box opened. Everyone inside looked reflexively at the door.

"Owen, let me introduce you to someone. This is Jin Qi Er, our friend from Danya—"

Edward walked into the box, only noticing Chris when he was almost finished with his sentence. His eyes widened in surprise at the sight of the commander, suddenly at a loss of what to do. The Danyas were standing right behind him; it was already too late for him to go back the way he came.

Yin Qie Zi glanced calmly at Edward's party. He immediately noticed that Cas was standing beside Edward. Cas was wearing the uniform of an imperial guard, his mask nowhere to be found. He was standing close behind Edward, as if he were the personal guard of the prince.

Yin Qie Zi widened his eyes upon seeing Cas, but he knew it wouldn't be good for him to appear surprised. He quickly withdrew his eyes and nervously turned his head. He only hoped no one had discovered his abnormal behavior.

In comparison, Cas' acting skills were far better than Yin Qie Zi's. Cas acted as if he didn't know the other at all. He merely glanced at Yin Qie Zi's conspicuous silvery-purple hair, a completely normal reaction for someone seeing that sort of hair color for the first time.

“This man here is Zhan · Chris · Wollier. The commander of our country’s Xialan Spiritmancer Regiment.” Summing up his courage, Edward proceeded to introduce both sides. “This is Jin Qi Er, an emissary from Danya.”

When the group of Danyas walked into the room, they had to bend their heads to avoid hitting the doorframe. Their tall stature immediately brought an overbearing feeling into the room. The box was supposed to hold around fifteen people, but it was already feeling crowded with just ten people inside.

The Danya who stood at the front was Jin Qi Er. He smiled and said perfectly in the human language, “Commander Chris is very well-known in my country.”

Chris only snorted coldly. He turned and instructed Owen, “After you buy the Leaf, remember to send it to me.” He left swiftly after giving his order, without saying goodbye to anyone.

At Chris’ sudden departure, even Edward, who was skilled at maneuvering social gatherings, had trouble keeping up his smile. He smiled drily and explained to the Danyas, “I apologize. Commander Chris must be in a bad mood.”

Owen and Mila blinked at his answer. If worded like that, then Chris had probably been in a bad mood for the past twenty years. Whenever anyone mentioned the Danyas in front of Chris, his expression would turn ugly. They should feel lucky that he hadn’t started admonishing them right then and there.

Owen turned around to look at Yin Qie Zi, wanting to poke fun at Edward’s distress with him. He quickly noticed that Yin Qie Zi’s expression was as ugly as Chris’. He had no idea why the other was unhappy again. On second thought, Yin Qie Zi simply didn’t like associating with people. Since there were so many strangers inside the box, it was natural for him to be unhappy.

Owen sighed to himself. It would be best if they could buy the Leaf quickly and go home.

“Ahem!” Edward coughed and said, “Owen, since we had decided to come to the auction on the spur of the moment, the attendant at the front couldn’t find an empty box for us. I didn’t have the heart to push him, so I decided we could just share the same box. I hope there isn’t a problem?”

*...Of course there’s a big problem!* Owen suddenly wished he could kill Edward



with his glare. They were aiming to buy the Leaf, but so were the Danyas. If they sat together in the same box, wouldn't it just be easier for their two parties to get into a fight?

Edward instantly noticed Owen's strange expression. Although he knew how to take a hint, he couldn't just turn around and leave.

Moreover, Owen knew how to conduct himself appropriately when needed. In front of the Danya emissaries, he couldn't simply reject his own prince's request, no matter how good a relationship he had with Edward.

"No problem. There's no harm at all!" While replying, Owen didn't forget to slap his friend on the back a few times. Of course, he didn't forget to use all his strength either.

Edward barely managed to prevent himself from coughing up blood at the force of Owen's slaps. He glared at Owen out of the corner of his eyes. He then ordered the attendant standing in the room, "Clean this place up a bit. Bring in more fruits and drinks. Also, bring in some more of those catalogs."

The attendant immediately nodded and went about doing as he was told. Not only was he extremely respectful, his movements were also quick and efficient. He understood that he was surrounded by nobles whom he couldn't afford to offend.

Everyone was already seated. Even Fenny, a maid, was sitting down beside Mila. The only one who was still standing was Cas. He stood beside Edward, looking especially cold. His whole person seemed to meld in with the shadows.

Seeing that Cas was the only one standing, Jin Qi Er couldn't resist telling Edward, "Your guard is a skillful man worthy of respect."

Edward laughed and said, "Indeed, Left Eye is very skilled."

Seeing that Edward did not plan on ordering Cas to sit, Jin Qi Er became slightly unhappy. Strictly speaking, every person in his entourage was his subordinate, but he would never allow them to stand while he was sitting. On further thought, this was probably one of the differences between their cultural practices. The palace of the humans was full of standing guards doing their duty.

This was very different from what he was used to. In Danya, skillful experts

were the most respected members of society.

At that moment, the attendant returned. He moved around, serving out plates of food and drinks like a rapidly moving river. He also didn't forget to place extra catalogs on the table. Edward smiled and picked one up. "Finally. Let's see if there are any interesting items at this auction."

Jin Qi Er followed and picked up another copy of the catalog. Despite this, he wasn't especially interested in the listings. He had a clear target for this auction. There was no need for him to look at anything else.

Seeing Cas standing beside Edward, Yin Qie Zi was finally sure that he was the prince's subordinate. Looking at Cas' indifferent expression now and remembering the twisted and crazy smile he had on a few days ago... It was quite difficult for Yin Qie Zi to accustom himself to the difference.

"Yin Qie Zi."

Hearing his name, Yin Qie Zi turned to look at the speaker. Mila was looking at him with a troubled expression on her face, as if hesitating whether or not to speak. He could guess why she was troubled. He quietly said to her, "You don't need to fight with the Danyas over the Leaf. I don't mind."

Mila nodded and said, "I'm very sorry."

"It doesn't matter."

Owen leaned forward with a bitter expression on his face. Gritting his teeth, he whispered back, "It doesn't matter? How simple you two have made it out to be! Did you hear what Teacher said to me when he left? He told me to bring the Leaf to him after I buy it! H-he knew the Danyas were also here to bid on the Leaf, so what do you think he meant by those words?"

Yin Qie Zi smirked and replied, "It means you're dead if you lose to the Danyas."

Owen gave a devastated smile. Mila leaned toward him and said quietly, "Owen, even if you want to bid on the Leaf, I don't think we've brought enough money. Uncle Chris mentioned that the Danyas often pay higher than the market value to buy Leaves. I'm afraid our money..."

“We can just buy on credit.” Owen said helplessly, “Since it’s Teacher’s personal request, Father should agree to pay for us, right?”

Anxiously, Mila said, “But if the price is too high, I don’t think even Father will be able to afford it.”

At that, worry appeared on both of their faces. In contrast, Yin Qie Zi was feeling quite relaxed. Even though the Leaf was originally supposed to be a gift for him, he still hadn’t figured out how he was going to find a place for the Leaf to live. Now hearing that the chances of him obtaining the Leaf was lower, he sighed in relief.

The auction finally began. Yin Qie Zi intently watched the stage as the goods came on one by one. The audience’s reactions were rather lukewarm at the start, but a buyer had been found for every item. Yin Qie Zi flipped through the catalog while watching the stage at the same time. There were quite a few special spirits for sale today. Although he wanted to buy some of these hard-to-obtain spirits, their prices were simply too high. He’d rather just order Litelli to go and find them in the wild.

He continued watching the auction, but he soon felt something was off. He turned around and caught Cas looking at him with a scornful smile on his face. In a blink of the eye, Cas returned to the indifferent expression of an imperial guard. It was as if the smile had just been an illusion.

But Yin Qie Zi knew it wasn’t an illusion. He lowered his eyes and intentionally avoided looking in Cas’ direction.

“Our next item is three strands of hair from a Flower. The Flower is the guardian of the Leaf Tribe. They are never apart from the tribe, so these strands of hair are especially rare spirits. It has been ten years since they’ve last appeared on the market. Every spirit binder sitting in the audience, make sure you don’t miss this chance!”

Yin Qie Zi couldn’t restrain a strange expression from appearing on his face after he heard the auctioneer’s words. He knew his body was comprised of numerous precious spirits; he had even used his own hair and blood to make some spirit medicines. But as a potential bidder, it was strange to see something he could find on his own body being sold onstage.

Those strands of hair shouldn't be his, right? Yin Qie Zi flipped through the catalog and stopped on the listing of the Flower's hair. In the description below, the strands were clearly stated to be violet in color. They certainly didn't belong to him then. Were they counterfeit items? Or maybe they came from another Flower?

After closely examining the information in the catalog, Yin Qie Zi found that the strands of hair came from the continent Junde; the only continent that still had a thriving population of Leaves. The catalog even gave a description of how the strands of hair had been obtained.

An adventure team had mistakenly intruded on the Leaf Tribe's territory and were subsequently attacked by the guardian Flower. The two parties battled with each other... The battle was described in a thrilling manner, but Yin Qie Zi knew none of it was true. If that adventure team had truly battled against a Flower, then they would've been dead in an instant. How could they have survived for so long? At most, they had intruded on the Leaf Tribe's territory and had been chased away.

Despite the exciting description, only three people were bidding on the strands of hair, but all three were determined to win. The price rose higher and higher, the three strands of hair soon became the highest priced item since the auction began.

Yin Qie Zi wasn't surprised at the rocketing price. A Flower's hair was capable of improving the body's constitution and overall function. The bottles of medicine he had given Owen on his birthday required this exact spirit. To other people, a Flower's hair was probably the hardest-to-obtain spirit. However, it couldn't be any easier for him.

Upon second glance, the three bidders appeared extremely familiar to him. They were all famous spirit binders in the city.

In the end, the strands of hair had been sold at twenty times their original price.

Mila made an effort to contain her expression, but she couldn't stop the ray of surprise that flashed through her eyes. Owen couldn't resist and turned to look at Yin Qie Zi's thick head of hair. Only after Yin Qie Zi glared at him a few times

did he turn to look at the stage again. Soon after, Owen leaned in close and whispered in Yin Qie Zi's ear, "It has been twenty years since the Leaf Tribe left Xi Zong. The auctioneer said that a Flower's hair hadn't appeared on the market for ten years. Does that mean the hairs that had been sold ten years ago belonged to you?"

Yin Qie Zi flushed red at the question. He turned abruptly and glared fiercely at Owen. Of course, he didn't bother responding.

Owen was startled by the other's glare. He didn't know what he had done wrong. Even Edward and Jin Qi Er were surprised by the two's sudden movements. Edward asked curiously, "How did you anger Yin Qie Zi again?"

Owen didn't know how to explain. He moved his mouth, but no words came out. Finally, Mila smiled and said, "Owen said something stupid again. He asked Yin Qie Zi why spirit binders are so strange and why they would pay so much for a few strands of hair. He had completely forgotten Yin Qie Zi was a spirit binder himself!"

Edward laughed at his friend. "You obviously asked the wrong question!"

Afterwards, Edward directed a question at Yin Qie Zi. "Did you want to buy those strands of hair as well? The price they had been sold for is truly shocking. What kind of spirit medicines can they be made into?"

Yin Qie Zi said simply, "The medicine they can be made into can improve the body's constitution. It is very effective on people who are suffering or have suffered a heavy injury. Although healing medicines don't require the spirits of a Flower's hair, their effectiveness is improved greatly upon addition. The medicine can completely heal an old injury and even improve the body's constitution to a state that is much better than before it was injured."

"Is that true?" Before Edward could even reply, Jin Qi Er cut in and asked excitedly. "Even if it's an internal injury from many years ago? Can the medicine heal the damage?"

Yin Qie Zi frowned and replied cautiously, "It would depend on the injury, but the effectiveness of this medicine is indeed very good. If you can tell me how long ago the patient had sustained the injury and what kind of symptoms they have, then I can hazard a guess whether the medicine will be useful to them."

As if he had finally found a doctor for an incurable disease, Jin Qi Er immediately set about describing the patient's symptoms. "Alright. He had sustained the injury around twenty years ago. Normally, the injury doesn't affect him. But whenever the weather is changing or when he is having an intense battle, he would start having chest pains and would sometimes have difficulty breathing. It's to the point where he has sometimes fainted after a fierce battle."

"It sounds like he has been injured in the chest?" Yin Qie Zi asked in detail, "Do you know how he had been injured?"

"He had been hit in the chest and sent flying. He had landed heavily and broken three ribs. It seems he had other injuries at the time too and had been bleeding heavily. I wasn't there when it happened, so these are only what I've heard from others. Additionally, he hadn't bothered nursing himself back to health after he had been injured. He rushed about day and night, which is why his injury is still plaguing him now."

Yin Qie Zi nodded and continued to ask, "How old is he now?"

"He's 182 this year," Jin Qi Er replied. Yin Qie Zi didn't react much to the number, but the expressions on the people around him immediately grew strange. Jin Qi Er quickly explained, "The lifespan of a Danya is around 300 years. If converted to a human lifespan, he is at the peak of his strength right now."

Yin Qie Zi frowned at Jin Qi Er's explanation and pondered to himself. Sitting opposite of him, Jin Qi Er stared at him nervously.

Yin Qie Zi finally nodded and said, "He can be healed. However, too much time has passed since he'd been injured. He will need to take a lot of medicine."

"Will the three strands of hair from before make enough?" Jin Qie Er quickly asked.

"I don't know how long it has been since those hairs have been pulled off. They are less effective the older they are. It also depends on the spirit binder's competence and how they will use the hairs. Usually, a spirit binder would use a single hair to make multiple bottles of the same medicine. They can cover their production costs this way, but the effectiveness of their medicine is drastically decreased."

Jin Qi Er turned around and started discussing eagerly with the others in his group. As the Danyas were speaking in their own language, no one else understood what they were saying, but they guessed the conversation had something to do with the spirit medicine.

Seeing they were having such a heated discussion, Yin Qie Zi cut in and said lightly, “Twenty years are simply too long. Even if a single hair is used for one bottle of medicine, he’ll need at least five bottles for him to be completely healed.”

The Danyas’ discussion immediately came to a halt. The smile that had been on Jin Qi Er’s face disappeared. He asked, “Does that mean we need five strands of hair?”

Yin Qie Zi nodded in response.

Unwilling to give up, Jin Qi Er continued to ask, “Are there no substitutes? Money isn’t a problem.”

Yin Qie Zi merely shook his head, shattering the other’s hopes.

Jin Qi Er was greatly disappointed. He turned around and spoke with the other Danyas; disappointment appeared on their faces as well when they heard his explanation. Jin Qi Er mumbled to himself, “If Indigo continues to be like this, then he’ll truly be replaced by White. I thought we finally had a ray of hope...”

*...Indigo?* Yin Qie Zi froze at the mention of that name.

An injury from twenty years ago? He had been sent flying and landed heavily? Rushing about day and night after he had been injured?

At that moment, Edward asked, “Indigo? Do you mean Indigo of the Four Colors?”

Jin Qi Er hesitated for a bit, but nodded. “Yes.”

“So that’s how it is. Twenty years ago... Then he must have been injured during the war.” Edward muttered to himself, only breaking out of his reverie when Owen slapped him on the back. Edward immediately noticed Jin Qi Er’s uncomfortable expression. His mind was blank for a moment before he realized why.

During the war between Zhan Yan and Danya twenty years ago, Indigo had been one of the two Colors on the battlefield. He had even been in charge of commanding the main assault army.

Edward quickly stated, "The war happened a long time ago. Aren't we at peace right now?"

Jin Qi Er merely nodded at Edward's question. He turned and asked Yin Qie Zi, "Does that mean nothing would happen even if he takes three bottles of this medicine? Would his body improve at least a little?"

Yin Qie Zi remained silent. He flipped through his copy of the catalog and folded the corners of several pages. He then handed the catalog to Jin Qi Er and said, "Go buy the special spirits I've marked and the three strands of hair from before. I will make it for you."

"What?" Jin Qi Er stared at him in shock.

"The medicine. I'll make it for you."

A bit surprised, Jin Qi Er asked, "You can make spirit medicine?"

"I'm a spirit binder."

Jin Qi Er didn't know how to respond. He thought for a bit and said, "But you said we need five strands of hair, the auction is only selling three."

"I will think of a way, but I'll need some time." Yin Qie Zi calculated in his head and spoke, "Give me two weeks, you'll have your medicine then."

Jin Qi Er hesitated for a long while, but finally asked, "What is your price?"

Yin Qie Zi was first puzzled when he noticed the other's cautious expression. The Danyas obviously greatly desired this spirit medicine, so why were they hesitating when he had offered to make it for them? However, when he heard Jin Qi Er's question, he finally understood why they were hesitant to accept his offer. They probably thought he was going to ask for a very high price. They might even be thinking that he was a swindler.

At that thought, a frown appeared on Yin Qie Zi's face. He didn't know what price he should ask of them. He didn't want their money. The only reason he had offered to make the medicine was because of his guilty conscience. After all,



Indigo's injury had been due to...

Judging from the situation though, it might make the Danyas even more suspicious if he said he would do it for free.

Yin Qie Zi didn't know how to respond. After hesitating a bit, he looked reflexively at Mila. When Mila blinked at him, he realized he was staring at her. What was he doing looking at Mila for help? She had no reason to help him solve his problems. Besides, she didn't even know all the details of the situation.

Mila chuckled, drawing everyone's gazes to her. Smiling, she told Jin Qi Er, "How about this? Forfeit your right to bid on the Leaf at this auction, that'll be the price for the medicine. Alright?"

Yin Qie Zi was shocked. He'd never thought Mila would make such a request.

At Mila's request, Jin Qi Er's troubled expression faded away. But he couldn't resist questioning, "Is your medicine truly effective?"

Before Yin Qie Zi could reply, Owen cut in and shouted, "What do you mean by that? Yin Qie Zi is the best spirit binder I've ever met. The medicine he makes are ridiculously expensive, but they're amazingly effective!"

Yin Qie Zi couldn't resist rolling his eyes at Owen.

Edward also added, "He is indeed a very skilled spirit binder. He once made a hair dye the color of Xialan flowers for my royal mother. The recipe for that hair dye had stumped several spirit binders before him."

Usually, if a customer was doubtful about the effectiveness of his medicine, Yin Qie Zi would tell them to not buy it. However, it was different now. No matter what, he wanted Jin Qi Er to take the medicine back to Indigo. But since he had never implored an unwilling customer to buy his medicine, he had no idea how to market his products when the situation called for it.

Even if Yin Qie Zi was incapable of marketing his medicine, Jin Qi Er wasn't about to waste this rare opportunity. He said, "I'll apologize first for what I'm going to say next. If your medicine doesn't work, then I will definitely come find you and exact justice. If it does prove effective, then I will personally apologize to you and bring along generous gifts!"

Yin Qie Zi secretly sighed in relief. He swiftly replied, "If the medicine doesn't work, then you can come and take away the Leaf. You don't need to pay any price. However, even if the medicine does work, you still don't need to come look for me." *You won't find me even if you do*, Yin Qie Zi added to himself.

Jin Qi Er finally felt assured by those words. In the end, he was still an emissary from Danya. If both the prince and the son of the Warlord were vouching for Yin Qie Zi, then the latter was probably not trying to swindle them. The most important thing right now was to buy the special spirits Yin Qie Zi had marked. He turned around and looked at the earmarked catalog with his subordinates. This was an important task, they couldn't afford to miss any of the special spirits.

Seeing that the issue of Indigo's medicine had been settled, Yin Qie Zi also calmed down. He turned around and saw Mila looking at him with a vague expression. The corners of her mouth were lifted only slightly in a semblance of a smile. In contrast, her eyes were glittering with light and overflowing with smiles.

Her smiling eyes were a bright green and they glittered like a lake illuminated by sunshine. Although Yin Qie Zi knew he shouldn't, he couldn't help but stare into her eyes. He stared at Mila until she pulled away and retracted her smile. What replaced it instead were two bright pink spots on her cheeks, making her appear as adorable as before.

Even though she hadn't wanted to avoid Yin Qie Zi's eyes and had been striving to win over her shyness, it was still too embarrassing to openly stare at each other in public. In the end, Mila lowered her head; the tips of her ears were bright red. She was hesitant to look at Yin Qie Zi again.

Seeing this, Yin Qie Zi also looked away. He suddenly felt that his own cheeks were burning with embarrassment. He rubbed his face and hurriedly said "Thanks for earlier" to Mila. He then looked down at the stage, as if he were very interested in the current item being auctioned off. The item was a long-sword, but Yin Qie Zi never saw the need to change his sword. His current sword, Nightclaw, had been obtained from the beast with the same name.

Beside him, Owen sighed loudly. Just now, Fenny had been glaring at him fiercely. Her terrifying expression seemed to have been saying that if he dared to breathe too loudly and disturb the moment between Yin Qie Zi and Mila, she

would chop his head off so that he couldn't breathe anymore.

Owen grumbled to himself, "Exactly who is the servant here? What is Yehv so busy with lately? Why isn't he here to control his wife?"

Even though they were called servants, Owen didn't actually dare enrage either Yehv or Fenny. They weren't normal servants after all. If he had an argument with them, he wasn't even sure whose side his father would take... Though it most likely wouldn't be his!

At that moment, the auctioneer declared that the next item was "One Leaf Slave." Yin Qie Zi jolted at the mention, but then remembered the Danyas wouldn't be fighting with him over the Leaf. Then wouldn't the Leaf be his now?

So...

Exactly what should he do with the Leaf?

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: Rose, dinoj

# Chapter 6: Blue...The Melancholic Past and Present

Servile Spirits Tribe? The hell are they? What does their tribe have to do with the information I want?

Is the king's intelligence team only capable of obtaining this kind of useless information?

Wait...Servile spirits take it upon themselves to find physical spirits and become their servants... They serve physical spirits?

Gong Hua, don't tell me there's a shorty by your side?

Ha! That'll make you much easier to find.

—Cas

Under the surveillance of two guards, the Leaf that was being auctioned off walked onto the stage. She was not bound by fetters and was wearing a clean white dress, appearing very pure and beautiful.

Although her features were beautiful, she was extremely thin. Even when using Leaves as the standard, she was still extremely thin. Her expression wasn't unpleasant enough to say she was miserable, but she certainly didn't appear happy. Compared to the blank-faced Leaves locked up in the prison, she appeared much more worried.

After seeing the Leaf that was being auctioned off, Yin Qie Zi suddenly felt that it might be good to take her away from this place. He couldn't do anything to make her happy, but he could at least make sure she had enough to eat so that she wouldn't look like she was going to fall over at any moment.

"That's a female right?"

Owen turned around and asked excitedly. Yin Qie Zi glared at him. The Leaf was clearly wearing a dress, anyone with eyes could tell she was female. Was there even a need to ask?

"Could you give that Leaf to me?"

Yin Qie Zi paused in surprise, and then realized that it had been Jin Qi Er who had spoken. Jin Qi Er had on a frightened and uneasy expression. As a tall and mighty Danya, it was rather funny to see that sort of expression appear on his face.

“How can you go back on your promise like this? Are you Danyas really this mistrustful of others?” Owen growled out furiously.

“Owen!” Edward immediately sternly reprimanded his friend.

“It’s all right!” Jin Qi Er explained quickly, “It’s not that I don’t trust you. I only want to exchange one of the Leaves from the peace offerings for this one. You can personally choose a Leaf from the ten we’ve received! How about this, I’ll even pay the bid for that Leaf!” After he finished speaking, Jin Qi Er immediately turned to his subordinates and ordered them to bid on the Leaf.

Everyone was stunned by Jin Qi Er’s request. Unless Yin Qie Zi insisted on taking the Leaf that was being auctioned off, Jin Qi Er’s offer wasn’t the least bit advantageous or detrimental to him. Because of this, Yin Qie Zi simply didn’t understand why Jin Qi Er would make this sort of offer.

“Are you personally acquainted with that Leaf onstage?” Yin Qie Zi was somewhat surprised. He originally thought Jin Qi Er had come to the auction because he simply wanted to buy another Leaf and that he wasn’t looking for a specific one.

“No, I don’t know her,” Jin Qi Er replied awkwardly. “It’s only because she has blue hair.”

Blue hair? Yin Qie Zi stared blankly at Jin Qi Er for a moment, but then he had a sudden epiphany. He abruptly remembered the Leaf called Aquamarine. Did Jin Qi Er perhaps want to bring this Leaf back and gift her to Indigo?

If that was the case... Yin Qie Zi looked at the Leaf onstage. Her head was lowered and not much expression could be seen on her face. Her slightly hollow cheeks added a weathered look to her appearance.

Instead of letting her stay at his side, wouldn’t it be better to send her to Indigo? If it were Indigo, he would treat her well. Yin Qie Zi turned around and told Jin Qi Er, “Promise me you’ll take good care of her on the way back to

Danya.”

Jin Qi Er paused, but then quickly replied, “Of course!”

Yin Qie Zi nodded in response, but then realized he should have asked for Owen and Mila’s opinions before agreeing. He quickly asked the two, “This should be fine, right?”

Owen scratched his face. He wasn’t opposed to Jin Qi Er’s offer. It was even better now that he didn’t have to pay for a Leaf.

Mila also didn’t have any objections. The only reason she and Owen wanted to buy a Leaf was because they wanted to gift it to Yin Qie Zi, a Flower, and prevent him from saving the Leaves who were acting as peace offerings. They didn’t mind if the Leaf wasn’t bought from the auction as long as they could give it to Yin Qie Zi.

“Then why don’t we leave first? I have to go back and prepare the materials I need to make the medicine. It’ll be a rather tight schedule to have it all ready in two weeks.”

Yin Qie Zi stood up after speaking. It was certainly inappropriate for him to leave before the prince and foreign emissaries, but Jin Qi Er immediately stood up at his words and spoke as if asking Yin Qie Zi a big favor. “Then I’ll be troubling you with this.”

“You can send the special spirits I need to the Warlord’s estate. I am living there at the moment. It’d be best if I could have them by tonight.” Yin Qie Zi didn’t hold back and bluntly ordered.

“No problem!” Jin Qi Er nodded in agreement. He then remembered that he was going to gift a Leaf to Yin Qie Zi and asked quickly, “When will you come to select a Leaf?”

“You can pick one and deliver it to me.”

Finished speaking, Yin Qie Zi walked up and grabbed the handles of Mila’s wheelchair. He pushed her out of the box, Fenny naturally following after them. Owen remained behind to keep Prince Edward company.

The hallway was especially quiet; they came across virtually no one. Most of

the attendees were still in the great hall or private boxes participating in the bidding of various merchandises. They occasionally passed by a few attendants in the hallway, whose hands were laden down with plates of food, catalogs, and other things as they rushed about.

As she was sitting in her wheelchair, Mila was unable to see Yin Qie Zi's expression, but she didn't try to turn around. She simply asked, "What's wrong?"

"...I don't want to see her."

"You mean the Leaf that is being auctioned off?"

Yin Qie Zi was quiet for a moment, but nodded in the end. "Yes."

In a consulting voice, Mila asked, "Then when Jin Qi Er brings over the Leaf he's promised you, should we let the servants take care of it first? You don't have to rush to see the Leaf, is that alright?"

Yin Qie Zi paused in surprise. He never realized he could do things this way.

Mila smiled and said, "Don't worry. I'll make sure the servants take good care of the Leaf and turn it white and chubby!"

Yin Qie Zi smiled faintly. "Thank you."

"Then why don't we go home—"

Fenny suddenly walked up and interrupted. "The weather is so nice tonight. Wouldn't it be a shame to go home so early? In any case, if we leave first, the carriage will have to come back and take the young master home. That would simply be too much trouble. Why don't we go for a walk first and wait for Young Master Owen? I know the perfect place for stargazing and it's nearby—"

"Fenny! That's enough. Yin Qie Zi has to go back and prepare the materials he needs to make the medicine." This time it was Mila who cut in, looking angry and humiliated.

Unexpectedly, Yin Qie Zi said, "That was only an excuse. Spending an hour or two out here wouldn't hurt. Let's go."

The other two were surprised at his answer. Not to mention Mila, even Fenny who had suggested the idea never thought he would agree.

“What’s wrong?” Yin Qie Zi felt their reactions were strange.

“It’s only that...” Mila was hesitant and spoke haltingly, “I didn’t think you would agree. I thought you would prefer to go back home first and research spirit medicines or something. Owen did say you dislike going outside...”

Yin Qie Zi paused in surprise, but then said unhappily, “Owen probably told you a bunch of things, but forgot to tell you about other things. It’s true that I didn’t go out much this year. But I was a traveler before I came to Qi Feng and had settled down here for only a year. The way Owen describes it makes it seem like I never went out the door my entire life.”

Mila was taken aback and asked curiously, “Owen did say you were a traveler before you came to Qi Feng, but he never mentioned that you had been traveling the whole time before coming to this city. Since when did you start traveling around?”

Yin Qie Zi smiled at Mila’s question, but instead of responding, he asked Fenny for directions and slowly pushed Mila’s wheelchair towards the stargazing site.

He explained as he walked, “I first started traveling with my teacher ten years ago, and only started traveling by myself these recent years. Well... I can’t really say I’m by myself as my servant Litelli is with me.”

What he had told Mila was only half-true. The only part he’d left out of his explanation was that his teacher was in fact Litelli. At that time, Litelli went by the name Lequilier and was a famous spirit binder. To avoid running into unwanted trouble, Yin Qie Zi had changed the other’s name to Litelli.

He had definitely learned the craft of spirit binding from Litelli, so it wasn’t inaccurate to call Litelli his teacher. Only, this teacher of his secretly held the concurrent job of being his servant.

“You started traveling when you were only ten years old?” Mila was surprised by his explanation. “That young? Traveling around must have been difficult for you?”

Yin Qie Zi smiled and said quietly, “Did you forget who I am? My appearance was the same ten years ago. I wasn’t a ten-year-old child.”

Mila was shocked at his answer, but then remembered Yin Qie Zi wasn’t the



twenty-year-old young man he proclaimed to be. His true age had to be over fifty years old. The things he had gone through in his life were things normal people would never experience. The entire Leaf Tribe had moved to a different continent, leaving him behind, alone...

“It definitely was a difficult path, getting to where I am now,” Yin Qie Zi replied simply.

Upon hearing Yin Qie Zi’s response, Mila felt an ache inside her heart. Yin Qie Zi’s words hadn’t been sorrowful and his voice had been rather indifferent, but it was because of this indifference that he gave off the feeling that he had already experienced all the trials life had to offer.

“It must have been difficult.” Mila didn’t know how to comfort the other. Yin Qie Zi had been abandoned by his entire tribe... How would she go about comforting him?

Yin Qie Zi didn’t respond. His entire path, how could it simply be described as “difficult?”

At that moment, Fenny spoke up quietly, “Miss, we’re here.”

Yin Qie Zi and Mila raised their heads to look at the sky and exclaimed in awe unanimously. They were at the end of the sidewalk, in a rather remote area that was sparsely lit. Not a single soul could be seen around them. But because of that, the stars that covered the sky above shined particularly bright, appearing especially enchanting to the eyes.

Yin Qie Zi wasn’t a stranger to star-filled skies like these; he had seen night skies that were even more beautiful. When he was still going by the name Gong Hua, he had sat under the Spirit Tree for many years with nothing to do. As a result, he would look up and gaze at the night sky to pass the time. The forest was much darker than the cities. There weren’t any artificial lights that smothered the splendor of the stars, so the sky naturally appeared more beautiful.

In reality, however, Yin Qie Zi didn’t pay any attention to the stars back then. What he truly looked at and appreciated was the night itself; it was the only thing that was similar in color to him. He even found the stars irritating to look at. They simply shined too bright and discolored the pure black of the night sky.

“Every time I look at the stars, I am reminded of how small I am in comparison!” Mila exclaimed admiringly.

Yin Qie Zi looked down at Mila. She had her head raised and was gazing at the sky, her green eyes reflecting the twinkles of thousands of stars. She seemed even more beautiful than usual. Her beauty did not lose even when compared to that of the Leaf that had been auctioned off. She only appeared livelier in comparison. But because of this, the people around her felt it was a pity that she was disabled.

However, Yin Qie Zi did not think Mila was pitiful. She might have trouble walking, but what did that matter? She had a bright, beautiful smile, a pair of glittering green eyes like a lake’s surface, and even the sunflower-colored hair that he liked the most...

He looked down at Mila’s golden hair, but then noticed the hairclip she was wearing. It was the black hairclip he had given her.

Normally, it would be quite jarring to see a black hairclip in golden hair, but Mila had cleverly twisted a part of her hair into a bun and tied it with a black lace ribbon that made the black hairclip less jarring. But as the hairclip was hidden by the ribbon, it was rather hard to notice. Yin Qie Zi hadn’t noticed Mila was wearing his hairclip until now because of this... Of course, the fact that he was heedless of outer appearances and rather slow to notice changes were probably a few of the reasons he hadn’t noticed until now.

“Black doesn’t suit you. Why don’t you return that hairclip to me? I’ll buy a different one for you.”

Mila blinked and then flatly rejected him. “No! This hairclip is mine! Who would take back a present like this?”

Yin Qie Zi stared at Mila in surprise; he never thought she would refuse. Ever since he first met her, Mila had never outright refused anything.

“Yin Qie Zi, why are you so attached to black?”

When he heard Mila’s question, Yin Qie Zi blurted out the answer automatically. “Because my—” *hair color was originally black*. He quickly clamped his mouth shut upon realizing what he was going to say, managing to

avoid revealing his secret.

He quickly stole a glance at Fenny out the corner of his eyes and noticed that she had deliberately hid herself in the shadows some seven or eight steps away. Despite this, Yin Qie Zi was sure she could see the two of them clear as day.

Fenny was Yehv's wife. Not only had Yehv participated in the war, he was also West's subordinate. Could he afford to take this risk right now? Wait! Yin Qie Zi paused in shock, what risk had he just been thinking about? H-had he actually wanted to let Mila see his true hair color?

Mila gazed up at him and asked somewhat disappointedly, "You can't tell me?"

Upon seeing Mila's disappointed look, Yin Qie Zi didn't know what came over him, but he bent down towards her ear and said without thinking, "Actually, my real hair color isn't silvery-purple... Don't tell anyone else! Including Owen!"

Mila sat stunned when she heard Yin Qie Zi's answer. She then quickly figured out what his true hair color was and understood why he had been so adamant about how the black hairclip was not a defective product.

The Leaf Tribe was a brightly-colored tribe. Black probably wasn't a color the tribe liked or preferred.

Mila quietly made a sound of agreement. She felt a bit sorry for Yin Qie Zi, but she also felt a glimmer of happiness as he had been willing to confide a secret that nobody else knew to her.

"Let's go. I think Owen is about finished chatting with the prince. If he still hasn't come out, we should just leave first without waiting any longer for him. He can walk home by himself!"

Mila chuckled and replied, "Haha. He'll be lost without Yehv to guide him."

"Even if he is an idiot, he should at least know how to ask for directions, right?"

"Pfft. You might be right."

Yin Qie Zi pushed Mila's wheelchair back to the auction house at a slow pace, occasionally exchanging a few words with her. Their conversations were mostly spirit binder related, and they soon started discussing the medicine Jin Qi Er had

ordered. Fenny, who was walking behind them, rolled her eyes in exasperation at their conversation and grumbled to herself about how the two of them were not the least bit romantic. She didn't curse at Mila's unromantic behavior as much, after all it was all that Yin Qie Zi's fault anyways. Even when compared to the forty-year-old Yehv, Yin Qie Zi's lack of romanticism was about a hundred times worse! Fenny sighed to herself. But if speaking of his true age, wouldn't Yin Qie Zi be much older than Yehv?

When the three of them arrived at the door of the auction house, quite a number of people were already walking out and leaving one after another on their carriages. It seemed the auction was about to end. Fenny asked their coachman and confirmed that Owen still hadn't come out yet. She walked back to Mila and Yin Qie Zi and discussed the matter with them. They decided to wait for a little longer in the end so the coachman wouldn't have to come back and pick up Owen... Thinking about it, Owen would never ask for directions and walk home by himself.

"Isn't this Miss Mila?" Five young nobles approached the three of them. Mila had been conversing with Yin Qie Zi and her smile froze when she heard her name mentioned. She turned around to face the group of nobles and lifted her lips in another smile, but it was only a superficial smile done out of courtesy.

"Long time no see."

While Mila chatted politely with the young noble who had spoken, Yin Qie Zi glanced over the rest of the group. What he first noticed were their clothes; this group of nobles were all dressed in gorgeous outfits that were no less extravagant than his. It seemed like Owen hadn't lied to him; he truly wasn't the only one who had dressed extravagantly for the auction.

Yin Qie Zi, however, wasn't the least bit happy at this discovery. The group of nobles before him looked like a frivolous bunch, though not all of them were the frivolous type. But the atmosphere they exuded as a group marked them as people Yin Qie Zi would avoid with a wide berth on a normal day. It really wasn't a joyful thing for him to discover that he was dressed the same way as the people he avoided like the plague.

Mila also didn't seem especially happy to have come across this group of

nobles. Although she had a smile on her face, Yin Qie Zi could tell that it wasn't a true happy smile. Mila's smile should be brighter than this. If she was truly happy, her eyes would turn up slightly. Even if her lips did not turn up, he should be able to see a clear smile in her green eyes.

"And who is this gentleman beside you?" One of the nobles opened his mouth and asked.

Yin Qie Zi glanced indifferently at him. Although the noble who had spoken was one of the less annoying ones in the group, it didn't mean Yin Qie Zi would smile at him.

"Gawain, this is Yin Qie Zi. Yin Qie Zi, this is Gawain. He's a friend of Owen's from the military."

For the sake of being polite, Mila should have introduced the rest of the nobles as well, but she decided to skip their introductions. Firstly because she was worried that Yin Qie Zi disliked associating with strangers. Secondly, she was slightly irritated that the group had interrupted her conversation with Yin Qie Zi. Due to her irritation, she had decided to not waste any time on further introductions. In any case, she wasn't familiar with any of the other nobles. If she hadn't noticed Gawain, she would've secretly motioned at Fenny to make some sort of excuse and send them away.

"Yin Qie Zi?" With a cheerful smile, Gawain said unaffectedly, "I truly must be ignorant. May I ask which family you are from?"

Gawain's attitude was especially friendly and likeable. It wouldn't be appropriate if Yin Qie Zi frowned at him too much, so he replied, "I'm not one of the nobility. I'm merely a commoner."

Gawain was only slightly surprised when he heard Yin Qie Zi's reply, but the nobles behind him reacted much more severely. They widened their eyes and frowned as they looked over Yin Qie Zi, their scrutinizing gazes blatantly rude.

Mila said inwardly to herself: *Yin Qie Zi isn't a normal person. He's of a much higher status than nobles. Nobles can be found everywhere, but there is only one Flower even when you add the continents of Xi Zong and Xia Sha together!*

Although the other nobles were frowning at Yin Qie Zi, Gawain's expression

contained much more curiosity than anything else. His eyes moved over Yin Qie Zi's outfit; his expression both curious and questioning.

"Owen gave me this outfit as a present," Yin Qie Zi replied simply to the other's silent questions.

A smile broke out on Gawain's face at Yin Qie Zi's answer. "Owen gave you clothes as a present? He doesn't even buy his own clothes, but this outfit really does suit you very well!"

Gawain's tone of voice was very friendly, but Yin Qie Zi couldn't help but feel something was off when he heard that Owen's extravagant present suited him. He quickly said, "I'll go and see if Owen is finished with his conversation. He's too slow!"

Mila nodded in response.

Yin Qie Zi turned around and left. Only when he had taken a few steps did he come to a sudden realization: how could he have left Mila alone with a group of men?

But when he turned around, he saw Fenny standing beside Mila. Only then did he suddenly remember that Mila had Fenny, who was extremely skilled at martial arts. What was there for him to worry about... No, even if Fenny weren't there, why would he be worried? In fact, he was the most dangerous person around Mila!

Yin Qie Zi found his pointless worrying hilarious, but after laughing at himself, a frown appeared on his face... Perhaps he was worried because he wanted to kill Mila personally and feared that she would die at the hands of someone else?

He shook his head and stopped his imagination from running wild. Instead, he focused on looking for Owen.

"Yin Qie Zi? Why are you here alone?"

Yin Qie Zi turned his head and saw Owen running towards him. When Owen came up to him, he immediately said snappily, "I came to see if you're finished with your conversation. You're too slow!"

Having been yelled at the minute he came over, Owen scratched his nose

sheepishly. "I thought you guys already went home."

"Fenny had suggested that we go stargazing nearby while waiting for you."

"Stargazing?" Owen almost wanted to rip off his ears and give them a cleaning. He most certainly heard Yin Qie Zi wrong. Not to mention stargazing, Yin Qie Zi wouldn't even spare a glance at a naked woman if she walked past him. And now the same Yin Qie Zi was telling him that he had willingly agreed to go stargazing?

"You've been really strange lately..."

Yin Qie Zi's heart skipped a beat when he heard Owen's words. Could he have been acting too lively recently and somehow stirred Owen's suspicious?

"I knew you were cold on the outside, but warm on the inside. My hard work this year finally paid off!"

Owen reached up and pretended to wipe tears from his eyes. Though he was just pretending, he suddenly felt a true urge to cry. He had been smiling and dealing with Yin Qie Zi's cold indifference for a whole year now. After such great effort, the cold atmosphere around Yin Qie Zi was finally starting to warm up. How could he not cry at such a moving development?

Yin Qie Zi rolled his eyes at Owen, all of the tension draining out of him. The only thing that remained was the urge to punch Owen a few times. Owen seemed to have already noticed this as he had silently taken two steps sideways, just enough so that Yin Qie Zi's fist wouldn't reach him.

Yin Qie Zi lifted an eyebrow at Owen's movements, but didn't step up to punch him. Instead he turned around and left the auction house.

Owen looked at Yin Qie Zi's back in surprise, but quickly followed after the other. At that moment, Yin Qie Zi turned around abruptly, scaring Owen so much that he jumped to the side, his arms crossed before his chest as if he was trying to ward off an incoming punch.

"Ha!" Yin Qie Zi laughed out loud. It was only a laugh, but it was enough to astonish Owen. "Let's go. Mila's waiting for us."

Owen clicked his tongue and asked, "How come Mila didn't come with you? If she knew she'd missed the chance to hear you laugh, she'd probably be so

frustrated that she'd lose her appetite. It's a shame since her appetite has been great recently."

At Owen's words, Yin Qie Zi retracted his smile and explained simply, "We came across someone named Gawain earlier. He's chatting with Mila at the moment."

"Gawain?" Owen hesitated for a bit, but asked, "He didn't say anything strange to you, right?"

"What could he say?" Yin Qie Zi felt something was strange. He'd been under the impression that Gawain and Owen were rather good friends. Looking at it now, perhaps that wasn't the case?

"Nothing especially..." Owen said somewhat reluctantly, "It's just that he's slightly interested in Mila, but Mila doesn't like him. So I thought he would... Uh..."

"So you really plan on matching me up with your sister?" Yin Qie Zi asked calmly. "I'm merely a commoner. That's not a very suitable status for her, right? Your father would certainly be against this."

"He wouldn't!" Owen quickly responded, "If my father was opposed to this, then he wouldn't have tested you that time! He would've gotten rid of you right off the bat... Ah!"

At that moment, Owen paused and stared at Yin Qie Zi. He exclaimed, "You already know Mila's interested in you?"

"Exactly how dense have you made me out to be?" Yin Qie Zi continued irritably, "These few days, I'm the one who has been pushing her wheelchair around. If you aren't trying to match me up with her, then are you trying to turn me into another brother of hers?"

Owen scratched his nose and mumbled, "There's a chance that could happen."

Yin Qie Zi glared at him and couldn't resist saying, "I simply don't understand when Mila started having an interest in me. I remember that when I first met her, you were already trying to set us up, but she didn't even know me back then."



“Who said she didn’t know you?” Owen then explained matter-of-factly, “Mila has been listening to me talk about you every day!”

“Is that so? I don’t remember you coming to find me for a chat every day though.” With a semblance of a smile, Yin Qie Zi added, “If you had done that, then I would’ve already poisoned you with some medicine. Would you still be able to talk to Mila and tell her things about me every day then?”

Owen couldn’t resist covering his mouth with a hand when he heard Yin Qie Zi’s reply. He looked as if he was truly worried that Yin Qie Zi would toss poison at him any moment, but the only thing Yin Qie Zi tossed in his direction was a glare.

“In short, she’s more knowledgeable about you than I am.” Owen opened his mouth and explained for his sister. “You know Mila can’t go out of the house, but she really wanted to know what you looked like, so she had sent Fenny to your store secretly to get a glance at your face and make it into an oil painting. That painting is still hanging in her room right now. She has drawn many portraits of you as well. Even though she has never seen you personally, her drawings are surprisingly accurate... Oh, you can’t tell Mila I’ve told you all this. Otherwise, she would get Fenny to kill me.”

“Are you that scared of Fenny?” Yin Qie Zi teased. “You can’t beat her in a fight?”

Owen hesitated for a moment, but replied honestly, “Exactly, I can’t beat her! Fenny isn’t a normal person. Don’t underestimate her. She had been personally taught by Yehv in martial arts. I heard she had started training when she was only two years old.”

Rather than being surprised by the fact that Fenny had started training when she was two, Yin Qie Zi was more shocked at something else. “Yehv raised Fenny?”

“Yes!” Owen replied somewhat enviously. “He found her, raised her, taught her, and then finally took her as his wife. Ah, how envious!”

“ ... ”

When the two of them arrived at the door of the auction house, Owen quickly

went over and said hello to Gawain. Contrary to Yin Qie Zi's previous thoughts, the two of them were rather close to each other.

More people were leaving the auction now than before; their surroundings were gradually becoming noisier. Using being tired as an excuse, Mila retired to the carriage first. Due to the crowd, Yin Qie Zi wasn't the one who lifted her into her seat.

Yin Qie Zi stood beside Owen for a while, but Owen and Gawain were talking about military matters that he wasn't the slightest bit interested in. The other nobles in the group were once again staring at him with rude gazes. It all irritated him, so he left for the carriage as well, without even the energy or the mood to leave behind a goodbye.

Owen was already used to this, but the others frowned at his sudden departure. Some started cursing at him.

"Aren't you being a little too condescending here? Who the hell do you think you are?"

"Come out of the carriage, you coward!"

"If you have the guts, why don't we duel?"

Owen quickly cut in, "Wait, his personality is just like this. Don't—"

Gawain smiled and interjected, "There's no harm in having a duel. Owen, I want to have a match with Yin Qie Zi as well!"

Owen looked somewhat helplessly at Gawain. This friend of his was rather easygoing and knew how to conduct himself appropriately, but he had a very ambitious heart. If Gawain truly liked Mila, then Owen would probably help him pursue her. Unfortunately, Owen wasn't sure that Gawain liked Mila enough to overlook her disability. What Gawain was most attracted to was probably Mila's status and privileges.

The minute Gawain joined in, the other became louder in their taunts. They were now even more determined to make Yin Qie Zi come out of the carriage for a duel.

*Bang!*

The carriage door had been forcefully slammed open. Yin Qie Zi sat inside the carriage and looked down at the group of nobles with his blood-red eyes. The previously noisy nobles instinctively quieted down. Some even lowered their heads to avoid Yin Qie Zi's gaze, afraid to look into that pair of chilling eyes.

Yin Qie Zi bent his waist and leapt down from the carriage. He then said simply, "Owen, I'm borrowing your sword."

Owen was shocked. He had wanted to stop them from fighting, but after thinking a bit, Yin Qie Zi probably wouldn't lose due to his skilled martial arts. Even if he didn't manage to defeat Gawain, he probably wouldn't back out of the duel in shame.

Moreover, the square outside the auction house was filled with nobles. The noise Gawain's friends made earlier had successfully stopped many people in their tracks to watch the commotion. If Yin Qie Zi managed to win the duel, then he would receive a reputation for being good at fighting. In Zhan Yan, that sort of reputation was very important.

Despite this, Mila and Owen hadn't thought Yin Qie Zi would make a good potential suitor because he was strong. Rather, they hadn't even known he was skilled at fighting in the beginning. But it would still be a good thing if Yin Qie Zi could win this duel and obtain a good reputation.

Owen offered up his sword and Yin Qie Zi accepted it. Gawain, who had been standing opposite of them, immediately became on guard. He could tell if someone was good with a sword just by looking at the way they held their weapon. Yin Qie Zi appeared very weak and thin, but he held his sword naturally. He was obviously very used to wielding a sword. How could a person like him not be skilled at fighting?

Gawain was slightly bewildered. Although he first pretended to not know Yin Qie Zi, he had actually investigated the other beforehand and knew that Yin Qie Zi worked as a spirit binder. Everyone knew spirit binders weren't good at fighting. This was because they spent a long time indoors studying spirit medicines and working with special spirits, causing their bodies to become weak and easily susceptible to disease.

Even if Mila knew her beloved Yin Qie Zi's occupation didn't suit fighting, she

wouldn't happily let him be beaten by someone, right? Gawain had planned to beat Yin Qie Zi in an easy duel, but now he was becoming apprehensive. At the side, Owen's eyes brightened in anticipation, looking every inch like a hot-blooded and competitive young man who was waiting to see an exciting duel. Mila even stuck her head out of the carriage, an exhilarated expression on her face.

"Come. Let's duel." Yin Qie Zi swiftly pulled his sword out of its sheath. He then added simply, "I still have to hurry home and prepare a few materials for spirit binding."

As matters stood, Gawain knew he couldn't back out of the duel. Otherwise he would become a laughingstock. He retracted his smile, took two steps forward, and pulled out his own sword.

The crowd slowly backed away from them, clearing a circle around Yin Qie Zi and Gawain that allowed them enough room to duel.

Zhan Yan was a country that thrived on battle; most of the younger population usually carried around weapons. An impromptu duel on the streets was a rather common sight, so the crowd on the square wasn't shocked at the sudden duel. Rather, they crowded around the duelers in high spirits and began to speculate at their identities and reason for the duel.

At that moment, Fenny lifted Mila off of the carriage. As she was close to the dueling grounds, she immediately drew the crowd's attention. Everyone quickly guessed that she was Mila of the Paladin family from the noticeable fact that she was sitting in a wheelchair and her distinctive features. Perhaps she was the reason for the duel.

There wasn't a judge for the duel. When both parties pulled out their swords, the duel had theoretically already begun. But at the moment, both duelers stood stock still in their spots. Despite this, there wasn't a single noise of complaint among the crowd. Instead they felt even more excited for the impending battle. From the long experience of watching duels, the crowd knew the ones who were more prudent with their attacks were more skilled fighters. This time, both of the duelers looked to be skilled. A duel between skilled fighters was definitely worth seeing.

Gawain's entire person was under a state of alert. He stared fixedly at Yin Qie Zi, not willing to miss the other's every single move.

Yin Qie Zi merely looked at Gawain's sword. It was a simple sword without any unnecessary decorations. Despite being simple, there wasn't a single stain or mark on the shiny, silver blade. It was a good sword and its owner obviously cherished it.

Usually, Yin Qie Zi would only make the first move two out ten battles, but this duel belonged to those rare times when he would make the first move. He quickly strode towards Gawain and attacked straightforwardly with his sword.

Gawain brandished his weapon, planning to strike Yin Qie Zi's sword aside. Unexpectedly, Yin Qie Zi nimbly flexed his wrist and changed the direction of his sword midway through the attack. His sword sped past Gawain's block and aimed straight at the noble's throat. Caught unprepared, Gawain was forced to back away.

Although Gawain backed away, Yin Qie Zi quickly stepped up to him again. Yin Qie Zi's series of attacks were fast and fierce, forcing Gawain backwards step by step. Gawain had no opportunity to counterattack. If he stopped for just a step, Yin Qie Zi's sword would pierce right through his body.

Gawain continued to move backwards, but the crowd was too slow to react. By the time they remembered to move aside, Gawain had already slammed into an onlooker, raising a round of alarmed shouts from the crowd.

Yin Qie Zi didn't take advantage of the situation to pursue Gawain and attack. In truth, if he had waved his sword just a bit closer towards Gawain earlier, he would have won the duel. For some unknown reason, when he saw Gawain slam against the crowd, he lowered his sword and did not attack. Instead he turned around and walked to the middle of clearing. He stood there quietly, as if waiting for Gawain to return and continue the duel.

By then, Gawain's expression had turned extremely ugly. He hadn't anticipated that Yin Qie Zi was skilled at successive rapid attacks. But this was a duel, how could he use "he hadn't anticipated the other's attack" as an excuse for his current losing state? The disparity between their strength was displayed for all to see. Even if Gawain didn't want to admit it, he knew he wasn't a worthy

opponent for Yin Qie Zi.

On the other hand, Yin Qie Zi was rather satisfied at how his attacks had turned out. He typically didn't use this type of rapid, fierce attacks to fight opponents.

Generally, his attacks were fast, but they weren't strong. The main focus of those kind of attacks was to aim quickly and keenly at the weak spots on the body, such as the throat or the heart. But after battling with Cas previously, he found that the other's style of swift and violent attacks could easily decide the results of a battle. If it was a short battle, then Cas' style of fighting was very efficient at obtaining wins.

Gawain straightened, his face completely ashen. He had deliberately provoked Yin Qie Zi himself, but got beaten completely. He knew his reputation was probably already ruined by the results of this duel...

"I'll be your partner this time."

A new voice cut in and spoke. Two alarmed shouts of "Teacher" and "Uncle" immediately followed.

Everybody froze and looked on in shock as a man walked out of the crowd. He was dressed in a neat and simple military uniform. His back was straight and tall; his whole posture exuded a natural and awe-inspiring sense of authority. It was the commander of the Xialan Spiritmancer Regiment, Chris!

Gawain stared nervously at his uncle. Chris, on the other hand, only gave a cursory glance at his nephew and said nothing. He knew how strong his nephew was; Gawain was one of the best fighters among his generation and was only slightly weaker than Owen. In fact, there was only a difference of two wins between Gawain and Owen. Because of this, Chris didn't think his nephew performed poorly in the duel. His opponent was simply too strong!

Chris frowned as he looked at Yin Qie Zi. He'd thought the other was only a spirit binder who at most knew some martial arts. He never knew Yin Qie Zi was this strong!

How could a young man like Yin Qie Zi possess such astounding strength? Chris had seen strong young fighters before. The strongest he had ever come across

was Prince Edward's personal guard. But that guard was at least thirty years old, the one in front of him right now... Calling him a teenager would even be passable!

Twenty years old. Chris remembered Owen had once told him Yin Qie Zi's age. The spirit binder wasn't a boy, but a young man. The strength he possessed at twenty years old was simply too shocking!

"Since when could you switch in someone new during a duel?" Yin Qie Zi asked indifferently.

Chris knew his cutting in didn't conform to the rules of a duel, but he wasn't willing to give up the opportunity to battle a strong opponent. He smiled and said, "This isn't a duel. I'm merely seeking battle advice."

The crowd around them gasped when they heard Chris' response. The grand commander of the Xialan Regiment had actually said he was seeking advice from a young man! How could that not be shocking?

"Teacher Chris!" Mila hurriedly shouted, "Don't make things difficult for Yin Qie Zi! How could he win against you?"

Chris smiled faintly and replied, "You don't need to worry. We don't know for sure that he won't defeat me."

The crowd felt Chris was only being modest by using the words "don't know for sure." In reality, Chris really did think that way. Yin Qie Zi might just be able to defeat him!

"Teacher!" Mila was so worried that tears were threatening to fall from her eyes, but Chris remained unmoved. He continued walking towards the center of the circular clearing, stopping only when he was about three steps away from Yin Qie Zi.

Yin Qie Zi frowned. He felt he had been too hasty this time. He shouldn't have accepted the duel as an opportunity to test his new fighting style. It seemed like he had roused Chris' suspicions. Fortunately, Chris didn't seem to have recognized him.

On second thought, his past self had no knowledge of martial arts and relied completely on the power to manipulate vines. Because of this, Chris shouldn't be

able to link the skilled fighting style he exhibited in the duel to Gong Hua. Chris might even be misled by the fact that he was skilled at fighting. At that thought, Yin Qie Zi relaxed.

Chris pulled out his sword, seriously intending to battle with Yin Qie Zi. Seeing this, Mila rolled her wheelchair in front of Yin Qie Zi and spread her arms open protectively.

Fenny and Owen immediately ran up to Mila's side. Owen said frantically, "Teacher, isn't this inappropriate? Yin Qie Zi is currently dueling with Gawain!"

Upon hearing Owen, Gawain felt an urge to jab his sword down his friend's throat. He finally managed to escape from a narrow death and it also seemed like he could protect his reputation. The gossip that was going to spread everywhere in the city tomorrow would definitely be about Commander Chris challenging Yin Qie Zi to a battle. There wouldn't even be a hint of his name in those news. But if the battle between his uncle and Yin Qie Zi never happened, then it meant he would have to continue the duel...

"What's inappropriate?" Chris responded without a care, "There's no harm in having their duel another day. Why don't they just yield this match to me?"

Owen was speechless. Duels were supposed to be serious affairs. They could even be called matters of life and death. However, most of the recent duels in the city weren't life-threatening battles. Even though they were called duels, it would be more accurate to say they were opportunities to compare battle notes. In any case, neither Gawain nor Yin Qie Zi were important people in the city. Their duel wasn't such a great affair that they couldn't afford to change the date.

Yin Qie Zi looked at the girl with a head of golden hair who had her arms spread wide in front of him. He found the situation quite funny. An unarmed and defenseless girl sitting on a wheelchair wanted to protect him? His opponent was also the well-known and imposing commander of a spiritmancer regiment? This was absolutely... What? Ridiculous? A gathering of ill-informed people?

Looking at Mila's back, however, Yin Qie Zi was unable to say those words out loud.

"Owen, step aside," Chris ordered simply.



Owen jumped in fright, but he didn't dare disobey his teacher's command. He hesitated for a moment, but in the end resigned to his fate and moved aside. *In any case, Teacher wouldn't kill Yin Qie Zi, right?* Owen thought.

Even though Owen had stepped away, Mila wasn't willing to budge an inch. Fenny moved up to push her wheelchair, but Mila stopped her in her tracks with a look, not allowing Fenny to even touch her wheelchair.

The current situation was extremely similar to the one from the past... Why was it that the weakest ones were always the people who refused to back down the most?

Yin Qie Zi reached out and gave Mila's wheelchair a push, the sudden movement startling her greatly. She looked back and Yin Qie Zi said to her, "Mila, go to the side. It's too dangerous here for you."

"But—" Mila still wanted to put a stop to this duel.

"It's all right." Yin Qie Zi cut in. He smiled and reassured her, "We'll only be comparing notes on our battle styles. We'll suffer minor injuries at most. There's no need to worry."

Upon seeing Yin Qie Zi's smile and listening to his gentle, comforting words, Mila ended up in a daze. Taking advantage of her momentary daze, Yin Qie Zi pushed her wheelchair to the side and then offered the handlebars to Fenny.

"Yin Qie Zi!" Mila shouted. Yin Qie Zi lifted his eyes and looked at her. At that instant, his red eyes were no longer the blood-red of before; instead they appeared similar to two blazing fires. Mila opened her mouth, but faced with the expression in his eyes, she found she couldn't say any dissuading words to him. She only reminded gently, "Be careful."

Yin Qie Zi smiled at her and turned around. He clenched his hand around his sword and called out to Chris, "Then please, I look forward to learning from you."

Chris pulled out his sword. At that moment, the duel officially began. The tension among the crowd had risen so much that they felt as if their hearts were going to leap out of their chests. But then they remembered that skilled fighters only attacked after much waiting and deliberation. Both Commander Chris and

Yin Qie Zi were skilled fighters, exactly how long would they have to wait for one of them to make a move this time?

Just when the crowd was mentally preparing themselves for a long wait, Yin Qie Zi made the first move. There was no harm done whether he wins or loses, he might as well treat Chris as an opponent to practice his new fighting style on.

Without the burden of winning or losing, Yin Qie Zi's attacks became fiercer. He held back on none of his blows and aimed directly for the throat. It was the same move he had used on Gawain, but this time, it wasn't as effective. Chris didn't raise his sword frantically like Gawain to protect against the blow. He merely shifted a step and avoided Yin Qie Zi's attack.

Yin Qie Zi turned his wrist and changed the direction of his sword, the tip now aimed at the other's heart. At this, Chris finally brandished his sword. Their weapons clashed together, split apart, and changed directions. They waved their swords, looking for an opening to attack, only to clash again as their respective blows were blocked by each other.

Faced with an opponent like Chris, Yin Qie Zi found that the fighting style he had stolen from Cas proved to be ineffective. Although they were using the same fighting style, he simply wasn't as strong as Cas. His own quick and violent attacks could not shake Chris and make him lose control. Rather, Yin Qie Zi was overexerting himself with this new fighting style. Several times, he switched tactics too late and nearly got stabbed by Chris.

Yin Qie Zi backed away while continuing to block Chris' attacks. Although it looked like he was retreating in defeat, he was actually slowly adjusting his fighting style to the one that truly belonged to him: attacking quickly while analyzing the structure of his opponent's weapon and breaking the chains that held it together. Unfortunately, he quickly found out Chris' sword was made of materials that was difficult to unchain... But difficult didn't mean impossible!

He continued to analyze the components of Chris' sword and proceeded to remove the chains that linked the spirits together one by one. Now he only needed to strike the sword once!

Yin Qie Zi kept his eyes on the spot where he had started the chain-breaking process. After parrying a few times, he finally saw an opening to attack. Like a

crafty snake, his sword shot straight at the weak spot he had created on Chris' sword. Just when he was about to strike the blade, he lost his balance. He immediately stumbled and his attack ended up being deflected by Chris. Yin Qie Zi quickly regained his balance and brandished his sword to block Chris' incoming attack, preventing his chest from being stabbed.

At that moment, Chris stopped attacking. He was slightly worried about his sword. Just now, he felt a disturbance in the spirits of his sword. Plus, it seemed like Yin Qie Zi had been deliberately hunting for a spot to strike on his sword earlier... All of this indicated that Yin Qie Zi had been planning to shatter his sword after breaking the chains that held it together. But how was that possible?

Seeing that Chris was motionless, Yin Qie Zi also lowered his weapon. He glanced down at his foot; there was an obvious pit on the ground. The pit was perfectly circular and exhibited irregular fluctuations now and then. It obviously hadn't been made by natural means. It was the work of chain-breaking!

Yin Qie Zi was surprised at this discovery. It was rare to come across a spiritmancer who could break chains while enduring his rapid attacks. Chris certainly was strong!

"You actually used chain-breaking on my sword?" Chris was equally shocked. He had been bestowed this sword by His Majesty the King when he had become the commander of the Xialan Regiment. It was made from the highest quality materials that was impossible to use chain-breaking on. If a professional spirit binder were to sit down and break the chains one by one, then it might be possible. But it was definitely impossible in an intense battle like this!

Yin Qie Zi smiled and replied, "I am a spirit binder."

Chris frowned at his reply. It seemed like he needed to have a spirit binder examine his sword after this duel. Suddenly, Yin Qie Zi brandished his sword. Chris immediately raised his own to block. When their swords struck together, an abnormal crack resounded across the square. Chris' sword split into two; the top half of the sword was sent flying by the blow and landed with a heavy clang just inside the auction house's door. Only the tail of the broken blade could be seen, still trembling from the force of the blow.

Chris' expression immediately darkened. When the crowd saw who was standing near the broken blade, they started in fright. It was Prince Edward!

Edward stared at the broken half of the sword with wide eyes. An icy feeling of fear was spreading inside his heart. He turned around with the plan to yell at the person who had been so careless, but to his surprise, he saw Chris holding onto the other half of the sword. Even though he was a prince, Chris wasn't someone he could curse at without thinking. Edward could only swallow the curses he had been about to fling.

Although everyone was worried that the prince had almost been struck by the wayward blade, Yin Qie Zi actually hadn't been aiming at the prince. Even though the blade had struck at a spot close to the prince, it was even closer to where Cas was standing. It had only been an arm's distance away from striking Cas.

*Seems like my wound has mostly healed!* Yin Qie Zi was very satisfied at the results. He couldn't resist a glance at Cas and saw a flash of a smile gracing the assassin's face, but the smile was gone instantaneously. Yin Qie Zi had no way of knowing the meaning of that smile.

Yet at that moment, both of them came to a realization. With both of their fast fighting styles, if they truly fought against each other, there would be no room for mercy. It would be a fight to the death!

In order to avoid rousing suspicions, the two of them retracted their gazes. Upon turning his head away, Yin Qie Zi immediately noticed the unpleasant expression on Edward's face. There was an equally unpleasant expression on Jin Qi Er's face, who was standing beside the prince. Chris left quickly after picking up the broken part of his sword resentfully. And there was an awkward expression on Owen's face... Yin Qie Zi finally started questioning whether he had gone overboard with the last attack.

He then looked down and noticed that Mila had rolled her wheelchair over. A dazzling smile was on her face, her eyes shining with delight. Yin Qie Zi suddenly felt he hadn't gone overboard at all. The one who wanted to duel with him was Chris. Who could Chris blame but himself for having his sword broken?

"We got delayed a bit. Why don't you give me the special spirits you've bought right now?" Yin Qie Zi looked at Jin Qi Er's unpleasant expression and decided to

not explain the situation. It was a fact that he hadn't abided by his word to return home early and prepare the materials he needed. There wasn't much to explain anyways.

While Jin Qi Er's expression was unpleasant, he didn't dare act hostile towards Yin Qie Zi. He only ordered his subordinate to hand the special spirits to the spirit binder. He then added uneasily, "Will you really be able to make the medicine in two weeks?"

Yin Qie Zi lowered his head and counted the number of spirits he had been given. After making sure none was missing, he responded, "Yes, you'll have it in two weeks."

Jin Qie Zi nodded. He still looked a bit apprehensive, but he was more hopeful than worried.

"I can't believe he broke Commander Chris' sword in half," Edward said sharply from the side. "Owen, are you sure he's a spirit binder?"

"Don't ask me. I don't know how strong he is exactly." Owen's voice sounded a bit exasperated. He didn't forget to glare at Yin Qie Zi a few times.

Mila quickly said, "You can't blame Yin Qie Zi for this! It was Uncle Chris who insisted on having a fight with him!"

"I know!" Owen mumbled, "You haven't even married him, yet you're already protecting your husband. What will happen when you actually marry him?"

Mila didn't understand what Owen was talking about at first. When she finally reacted, her expression did a flip. She had the urge to punch Owen a few times. Secretly, she snuck a few glances at Yin Qie Zi. When she saw that Yin Qie Zi hadn't reacted, she thought he hadn't heard Owen and felt relieved.

"Left Eye is also a skilled fighter. Do we want to see who's stronger between these two?"

Edward looked at Yin Qie Zi and then at Cas. Despite his taunt, he was very confident in Cas' skills. He didn't believe Cas would lose to Yin Qie Zi.

Mila yelled anxiously, "No more fighting! Yin Qie Zi is a spirit binder, not a spiritmancer! Don't bully him anymore!"

*He's a fellow who's capable of breaking a spiritmancer regiment commander's sword! Exactly who is bullying whom here?* Owen and Edward were both speechless.

“Let's go home! If Owen is unwilling to leave, then he can walk home.”

Mila picked up Yin Qie Zi's hand and forcefully rolled her wheelchair in the carriage's direction. Seeing this, Yin Qie Zi couldn't resist a chuckle. He walked behind Mila and helped her push her wheelchair towards the carriage. While lifting her into her seat, he said, “Yes, let's leave first. Owen can go home by himself.”

“...Hey, wait for me!”

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: dinoj, Rose

# Chapter 7: Nightclaw...The Death He Brought and Left Behind

Finally...

I finally found you, Gong Hua!

I'm going to kill you! I will kill you! After I kill you I will, will...

I will what?

—Cas

*You killed Aquamarine... You killed my wife!*

*No matter where you've escaped to in Sisha, I will find you and take revenge for my wife!*

Yin Qie Zi abruptly woke up. He pulled out his sword from beneath his pillow and jumped out of bed in one swift motion. His whole body stretched taut with tension as he stood ready for battle.

There was someone in his room...

"Don't panic. It's me."

Yin Qie Zi stared blankly in the direction of the voice. The person who had spoken stepped out of the shadows. He was dressed in dark clothes suitable for the night. A scar marred the person's left eye and a wicked smile lingered at his lips. It was Cas.

After seeing who it was, Yin Qie Zi unwittingly loosened his grip on his sword.

It was laughable that he actually felt at ease upon seeing Cas. The other was someone who hated him to the core. In theory, he should be especially wary about being alone with Cas, but Yin Qie Zi knew Cas wouldn't kill him so easily... Just like how he wouldn't kill West so easily.

"That's one good sword you have."

Cas stared at the sword in Yin Qie Zi's hand. He quickly figured out that it was a first-rate sword made by a master craftsman. Even a fortune wouldn't be enough to buy a sword like that.

“Where’d you get it? Steal it?”

“Did you sneak in here in the middle of the night to ask about my sword?” Yin Qie Zi replied snappily.

“Of course not.”

Cas walked over to Yin Qie Zi’s bed and plopped down without any reservation. He crossed his legs and asked, “Are you going to tell me or not?”

Yin Qie Zi stayed quiet, but then responded lightly, “What if I don’t want to tell you?”

“Heh!” Cas’ expression darkened. “Don’t want to tell me? Are you saying you don’t know the consequences of that?”

Yin Qie Zi chuckled coolly and said, “If my identity ever gets exposed, I will either escape or be murdered. Which one do you want to see the most? I’m sure it’s neither.”

Seeing that Yin Qie Zi wasn’t going to tell him anything, Cas stood up and rested his hands on the handles of his daggers. He said coldly, “I think chopping you into bits and pieces is what I’d like to see right now.”

The two of them stood silently, divided only by a bed. One of them holding onto a sword and the other ready to pull out dual daggers at any moment. If one of them dared to move an inch, they’d probably battle to the death right then and there.

Yin Qie Zi and Cas stayed in their positions for quite a while, but ultimately, nothing occurred. Yin Qie Zi slowly sheathed his sword and said quietly, “This sword’s name is Nightclaw.”

Cas stared at him in shock. “Nightclaw? The beast that attacked us back then?”

Yin Qie Zi nodded and explained, “Owen was the one who named the sword Nightclaw. Probably because we’d obtained this sword from Nightclaw’s hands.”

“From Nightclaw?” Cas frowned and asked suspiciously, “Did he give us a sword back then?”

“It wasn’t during that attack. It was when the Danyas breached Chakou City.



The army was escaping to the west, leaving a trail of bodies behind them. Nightclaw appeared during that time...”

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“Gong Hua! Gong Hua!”

Owen was calling his name nonstop, the other’s voice coming from behind him. This assured Gong Hua greatly. He wanted to turn around and see how Owen was doing, but he was unable to do so as there were simply too many soldiers in front of him. He had to focus on instructing the vines to ward off the enemy soldiers that were threatening to overwhelm them like an unstoppable tide.

Most of the Danya soldiers who’d fought their way into the city had hands dyed red with the blood of humans. They weren’t the least bit afraid of the wrist and waist-thick vines Gong Hua were using. Although the soldiers appeared bewildered by the vines’ movements, they merely brandished their swords and cut the vines into pieces. They weren’t afraid at all.

“Gong Hua!”

Owen pulled Gong Hua towards him. When he saw the other’s tear-streaked face, he paused in surprise and couldn’t help ask, “What’s wrong?”

Fear clouded Gong Hua’s face and a tremor took over his voice. “Owen, they are scary...”

“Don’t be afraid. We’ll leave right now!”

Owen took hold of him and looked back at West, who was still staring blankly at Gong Hua. Owen quickly reminded his cousin, “Ge, we have to leave!”

Hearing Owen, West finally snapped out of his reverie. He looked at Gong Hua. What he saw was no longer a weak girl, but a frighteningly powerful existence. In a trembling voice, he asked, “E-exactly who is she?”

“Now’s not the time to worry about that! We have to go!”

The three of them mixed in with the escaping crowd and headed for the city gate. The sky was a dusky grey that made it hard to see where they were going, but everybody was escaping in the same direction, so they had no doubts where

they were headed. Moreover, as they had Gong Hua's vines for protection, they managed to reach the city gate uninjured.

Before they could even let out a breath, noise of an uproar drifted over from the front. A loud rumbling immediately sounded afterwards. The double doors of the city gate was closing!

Seeing what was happening, the crowd rushed toward the gate even more desperately. People pushed and shoved their way to the front, fearing that they would be shut inside the city. There were simply too many people trying to escape. Many tripped and fell to the ground, only to be trodden underfoot by the frantic crowd, never to climb back up again.

Owen knew they would never reach the gate like this. He quickly pulled the other two out of the crowd, fearing that they would be trampled to death. The three of them took refuge under the eaves of a house. They took in the panicked expressions on the soldiers that passed by them. It was everyone for themselves. Panic took over their hearts; they had no idea what to do next.

"Owen, those scary people are here!" Gong Hua suddenly exclaimed.

Owen turned to look. A mass of Danya soldiers were moving towards them. The soldiers held pikes in their hands, the pointed tips aimed forward. The pikemen stood in a uniform file, not a hint of the desire to escape apparent on their faces. As they had shut the city gate, it was obvious that the Danyas were planning to wipe out every member of the human army.

Owen quickly shouted, "Gong Hua! Take us out of here!"

Even if Owen hadn't said anything, Gong Hua still would have done so. This place was filled with fear and death. He didn't want to stay in the city another second longer!

Wrist-thick vines erupted out of the ground, taking hold of the three of them around the waist. The vines climbed over the roof of the house and scaled up the city wall, pulling them up and out of the city.

Their journey up the city wall drew many eyes to them. There were numerous Danya soldiers situated on the wall; they had a perfectly clear view of what was happening. But what they saw was something beyond what common logic could

explain. The Danyas stood still in shock, not even remembering to attack. However, they didn't stay shocked for long. They were still fighting a war. The humans down below were still frenziedly attacking the city gate trying to escape.

Beside the Danyas, West was also shocked. He knew that some powerful physical spirits were capable of using spirits to attack. He also knew that some could move objects using their will, but it was his first time seeing a physical spirit move objects so adeptly, as if these vines were merely extensions of her arms and legs. Moreover, it seemed like these vines had been grown in an instant.

"Ge, we have to go! Quickly!" Owen pulled at West. He urged, "The Danyas will catch up to us in a few minutes!"

West nodded numbly and followed after Owen for a few steps. Suddenly, screams sounded behind him.

"Let me out! The Danyas are here to kill us!"

"Save me! I don't want to die!"

"There's no way we can get out. Everyone turn around and attack!"

"Ah—"

"N-no!" West paused. The sounds of killing and pleas for help mixed into one continuous din, swirling in and out of his ears. The pleas for help were spoken in the human language. When he thought of his fellow soldiers being mercilessly slaughtered, pain filled his heart. He grabbed Owen and said difficultly, "Owen, Owen, we can't leave... Our comrades are being slaughtered inside there! We can't let the Danyas massacre everyone in Chakou!"

Owen stared at him in surprise, finally hearing the screams for help. The more he listened, the more fearful he became, and the more he couldn't turn around and walk away.

"Owen!" West said hurriedly, "We have to at least open the gate! We have to give them a way to escape!"

Upon hearing West, Owen finally realized what he could do. He quickly turned and ordered, "Gong Hua, use some bigger vines, like... like the ones you used to

destroy that town. Use them and break open this gate.”

Owen still remembered the marks those vines had left on the ground. The vines that had rolled over the town and destroyed it were not the wrist-thick ones in front of him right now; they were the size of a massive beast. If vines of those size were to appear, then they could break open the gate. When the Danyas see those vines, they would definitely feel... an unimaginable terror.

“We can’t leave?” Gong Hua asked timidly.

Seeing Gong Hua’s frightened expression, Owen quickly placated, “We’ll leave after we open the gate.”

Gong Hua nodded in response and turned to face the gate. His black hair strands floated up, gradually surrounding him in a dark mass of floating hair. The darkness that enveloped him didn’t only consist of hair, a black fog gradually cloaked the strands of his hair and the spaces in between, becoming darker and darker. In the thick darkness that shrouded Gong Hua, the only thing that shined brightly were his blood-red eyes.

“H-how could she turn so...” West paused, he found that he couldn’t think of any words capable of describing the scene he was witnessing.

Owen was also stunned at the sight. He had never seen Gong Hua appear this way.

Gong Hua’s floating hair abruptly halted its movements. At that moment, two massive vines pierced through the earth near Gong Hua’s feet. The resounding crack the vines made was clear and distinct even over the sounds of the raucous battlefield. The city was suddenly taken over by a stunned silence.

West was dumbstruck with shock. Owen tilted his head to look at the vines that towered above him, his heart filled with fear. He couldn’t help but think of the small town that had been ravaged by these vines. Even if he was a soldier, even if he knew the vines would not attack him, he couldn’t hold back the horror of seeing those enormous vines. Did the residents of that town—mere helpless citizens—feel even more dread and desperation when they gazed upon those vines?

The two vines aimed straight for the city gate. Owen started at the sight and

quickly grabbed Gong Hua. He yelled, “Stop! You’ll kill the soldiers behind the gate if you ram it directly!”

Gong Hua halted the vines in their tracks and turned to look at Owen. His face was largely covered by his hair, his blood-red eyes were the only things that were exposed. He stared at Owen unblinkingly.

Unconsciously, Owen released his grip on Gong Hua. He took a step back, fear rising in his heart. Did Gong Hua lose all her rationality again?

“Owen?” Gong Hua took a step toward him.

Hearing Gong Hua’s voice, Owen paused. The other’s voice was still timid; Gong Hua hadn’t lost control at all. At this, Owen decided to truly look at Gong Hua. He stared past the terrifying cloud of black hair and directly at the person inside. What he saw was a girl who didn’t know what to do next.

Seeing this, Owen’s heart softened. He quietly ordered, “Don’t use too much strength. Use the vines to hit the metal parts around the gate. The bronze-colored ones. Do you see them?”

“Yes.” Gong Hua nodded cleverly.

At that moment, another round of screams from inside the city pierced the air. Alarmed, Owen yelled, “Gong Hua, hurry!”

The vines shot toward the gate the minute Gong Hua turned around. Like Owen ordered, the vines rammed against the borders of the gate, but the metal parts did not break with the first hit. The vines struck the gate for another five to six times before cracks started appearing. After a few more hits, the earsplitting sound of metal breaking apart filled the air. The left part of the gate tilted and started to fall.

*This’ll lower the number of casualties, right? Although we can’t save everyone...* Owen thought regretfully to himself.

Just when the left part of the gate was about to crash into the ground, vines shot out and wrapped around it. The vines pulled backwards, bringing the gate with them. When they were far enough from the city, the vines flung the gate aside.

A mass of soldiers were standing behind the gate, but none of them were injured from the gate falling down. They stared blankly at each other for a few seconds, but then realized there was nothing obstructing their escape route and rushed out of the city like a violent tide.

Owen was surprised that Gong Hua had done something he hadn't told her to do and saved the soldiers from being crushed. Gong Hua turned around to look at him, a questioning expression on her face. She appeared somewhat worried, as if she didn't know whether she had done the right thing.

Owen felt an urge to laugh when he saw the other's expression. He reached out and rubbed Gong Hua's head. While smiling, he said, "You did well. Good child."

A happy smile appeared on Gong Hua's face. He turned around and used vines to tear the remaining part of the gate out of the wall. Like with the other, the vines pulled it out and flung it away.

Owen silently watched Gong Hua's actions. He couldn't help but feel that if Gong Hua had met Mila or him first, they could've avoided the tragedy that occurred at that small town. Gong Hua didn't possess any evil intentions in her. The only thing she needed was guidance.

Although the falling gate didn't cause any injuries, the soldiers' desperate need to escape caused many to be trampled to death. The situation seemed to be worsening rather than improving. The Danyas also seemed restless at the sight of the escaping soldiers as dying screams kept drifting out of the city. This only made the soldiers shove harder.

"Stop shoving!"

West roared angrily, "Are any of you acting like soldiers? Stop this right now! You're stepping on your own comrades!"

Owen stared at his cousin in shock, but then turned around and directed an order at Gong Hua.

West was irritated that the soldiers weren't listening to him. At that moment, something wrapped tightly around his waist. Before he could even react, his whole person lifted off the ground. West exclaimed in alarm as he flew five or six

meters into the air. In his panic, he heard Owen shouting at him down below.

“Ge! Say something! Everyone’s looking at you!”

West paused in surprise, but noticed that every soldier had indeed raised their heads to stare at him. Terrified expressions still decorated the soldiers’ faces, but at least he had their attention. At this, West ignored his own fear of flying and roared at the soldiers below, “Listen to me!”

The soldiers stared in astonishment at West soaring high above the ground, their fear of the Danyas momentarily forgotten. They recognized West’s uniform. Seeing that a superior officer was amongst them, most of the soldiers finally calmed down.

“Make way—”

Before West could finish his order, an arrow flew past him and scraped his cheek. Alarmed, he turned his head and saw a rain of arrows coming at them from the direction of the city wall. He yelled in fear and moved to step back, but then realized that he was still hovering in the air. Where could he step back to? He could only watch the rain of arrows coming down...

Seeing what was happening, Owen quickly yelled, “Gong Hua!”

Gong Hua stretched out his right hand. Vines exploded from the ground under West’s feet and immediately expanded into a web of vines that protected them from the arrows.

Everyone was rendered speechless by the display. In their moment of awe, numerous vines sprouted quietly beneath the city walls. They snaked up the walls, quickly overtaking it in height. The vines split apart, giving rise to multiple branches. The branches mixed and banded together, covering every last corner of the sky in green, appearing like an extension of the city wall. Only, this wall wasn’t protecting the city from invaders, but confining the archers on the city wall.

West hesitated for a moment after seeing the wall made of vines rise up. Should they escape now or stage a counterattack?

He looked around him. The soldiers who’d made it out of the gate have already calmed down, but they were still being pushed and shoved along by soldiers at

their back. Even if they wanted to stop, the torrent at their back carried them forward.

West looked at his fellow soldiers. Fear still clouded their faces, not a single bit of courage could be found. Their state of dress was a mess and few were carrying weapons. It seemed they had been forced to escape for their lives right after waking up. These soldiers couldn't fight a war right now!

Helpless to do anything and unable to suppress the pain in his heart, West shouted an order at the broken army:

“All soldiers retreat!”

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The fallen army escaped from the city. New soldiers grouped with them halfway through the journey, but more fell down and died along the way.

Corpses littered the road, dyeing the ground the same color as the red carpets used for banquets. The escaping army left behind a trail of blood that stretched as far as the eye could see.

The Danyas who were chasing after the human army dared not step on the trail. Even a soldier in the throes of insanity would not be able to suppress a shudder upon seeing that carpet made of flesh and blood.

The honored guest who dared to step on this red carpet was a spirit beast, Nightclaw.

He had followed the stink of blood and rotting flesh here. As usual, he brought with him a pack of beasts. The pack had been growing each year, now appearing like a small-scale army.

The Danyas carefully avoided contact with this pack of beasts, not wanting to incite any unnecessary trouble. However, the escaping human army didn't have the luxury of doing that. They had escaped from Chakou on the spur, they were running out of food and some days they couldn't even find water to drink. They could only pray that there was a river or a lake ahead of the road. They didn't have the time to worry about the pack of beasts behind them.

Fortunately, Nightclaw did not plan on catching up to the humans and killing



them off. He stayed behind them, waiting for the teetering humans to fall down by themselves. Only then would he leap forward and feed to his desire.

He only used to appear during the night, but now the humans could see him chasing after them brazenly during the day. Nightclaw tore apart the fallen bodies under the scorching sun, some of the corpses still alive enough to let out a weak cry for help.

The Danyas were terrifying, but no matter how terrifying they were they didn't eat humans!

Fearing that they would be eaten, some soldiers deserted the procession line and ran for their lives. They never imagined that they only made themselves easier targets for the beasts. Sounds of horror and death erupted all around the army. The soldiers didn't dare leave the line anymore; the despair in their hearts rose up another notch.

After hearing another scream of agony, West couldn't even swallow the meat they seldom got a chance to eat. He growled furiously, "We can't continue like this! The beasts are increasing in number. If this continues, they'll start attacking us sooner or later!"

Owen didn't respond, not even to remind his cousin to lower his voice. The soldiers were already terrified of the beasts, seeing their superior lose control and yell wouldn't make it any worse.

"We have the Danyas chasing after us during the day and now we have to be on guard against those beasts during the night. If anyone dares to desert the line, the beasts will pounce and eat them alive. *Alive!* How are we going to make it through this?"

At that, West's eyes drifted over to the person sitting at Owen's left. Gong Hua always sat in the same spot beside Owen, often with his head lowered. He never spoke and never left Owen's side.

Seeing where West was looking, Owen's heart sank. He said, "We don't know for certain that Gong Hua can defeat Nightclaw."

*Moreover, she hates killing.* Although the reason was laughable, he and Gong Hua were essentially serving as shields while the army escaped. They were in

charge of defending against the Danyas' attacks. Most of the time, large scale slaughtering was the only effective way.

West hesitated for a second, but asked, "Can't we at least try?"

Owen exploded in anger. He roared at West, "*Try?* What if she can't defeat him? Even if you don't care about Gong Hua's life, you should at least ask yourself who's going to defend us against the Danyas when she gets injured!"

West didn't cower in the face of Owen's anger; contrarily, he roared even louder at Owen, "Then tell me, what are we going to do? If we continue like this, how many soldiers do you think will make it back to the Old Zhan Plains? Can you stand watching your own comrades being eaten alive by those beasts?"

As if to prove West's words, cries of distress sliced the air far away. It didn't sound like one or two people screaming, but a group of ten or more.

West and Owen both jumped up in alarm, ugly expressions mirrored on their faces. The screams didn't stop, instead more followed and seemed to be getting louder and closer.

"Don't tell me..." At a complete loss of what to do, West asked, "The beasts really are attacking us?"

The soldiers around them became restless, some calling out "Zong Xiao" and looking to West for instructions. However, West didn't have anything planned, he only wanted to take some soldiers and go save the others from the beasts' jaws. But everyone was tired and hungry; they were all at their limits. Not to mention ordering soldiers to put their lives at stake and go fight the beasts, West felt like the whole army would break apart if a light wind swept over them right now.

West's eyes floated over to rest on Gong Hua. Not only him, other soldiers also started looking in Gong Hua's direction. Most of them knew Gong Hua had a special power; some had even personally witnessed Gong Hua using vines to kill Danyas.

Normally, the soldiers would never come anywhere near Gong Hua, but amidst the clamor made by the screams and the growls from the beasts, they couldn't help but move closer to him.

“Don’t look at her!” Owen spread his arms and blocked Gong Hua from view. He was furious enough that even he wanted to have a bite at West and the other soldiers.

West didn’t say anything, but he didn’t need to. The screams and growls that were moving ever closer did all the speaking for him.

Once again, Owen was faced with a difficult decision. Then again, he had to make difficult decisions every single day. Would he rather watch Gong Hua slay the Danyas or watch the Danyas slay his own fellow soldiers?

Owen never deliberately ignored the soldiers’ cries for help before. No matter how reluctant, in the end, he’d bring Gong Hua to the back of the troops to fend off the Danyas. Their enemies right now were beasts. Would it be any lighter on his conscience if they were going to kill beasts instead of Danyas?

Even then, he was worried that Nightclaw would attack Gong Hua. Can Gong Hua defeat such a terrifying spirit beast? What if she couldn’t win...

Owen suddenly felt a pull on his clothes. He reflexively looked over and saw that it was Gong Hua.

Gong Hua said nervously, “Owen, don’t be angry. It’ll be fine if I just kill Nightclaw, right? I’ll go kill him. Don’t be angry.”

Upon hearing that Gong Hua’s only reason for killing Nightclaw was so that he wouldn’t be angry, Owen felt he had been slammed against a wall. There was so much pain in his heart that he couldn’t even reply. If he really thought the best for Gong Hua, then he should take her and leave this place far behind. Like Mila said, they should go to a different country and never come back.

In a hoarse voice, Owen asked, “Gong Hua, can you defeat Nightclaw?” *Mila, if you knew I let Gong Hua kill, you’d probably yell at me, right? But if I don’t let Gong Hua go, how many soldiers will make it out of this alive?*

Gong Hua hesitated for a moment. He had fought with Nightclaw before, but neither of them had brought out their full strength. He didn’t know whether he could defeat Nightclaw. When he lifted his head and saw Owen’s expression, however, he couldn’t resist nodding and replying, “Yes, I can defeat him!”

Hearing Gong Hua’s reply, Owen was a bit relieved. At least Gong Hua’s life

wouldn't come under any harm.

"Owen, can you stay here instead of coming with me?" Gong Hua requested in a quiet voice.

Owen stared at the other blankly. Ever since Mila died, Gong Hua had refused to leave his side. Why was Gong Hua requesting him to stay here now?

"I'm going to kill Nightclaw. It'll be very dangerous over there. Owen, don't come with me."

After he finished speaking, Gong Hua let the vines wrap around him. Owen immediately shouted at him to wait, but Gong Hua left without turning around.

In shock, Owen stared after Gong Hua for a moment, and then ran after him.

West quickly grabbed hold of his cousin. "Owen, she already told you to not follow her. It's dangerous. Didn't you hear?"

Flustered, Owen said, "I need to go and see. Gong Hua, s-she would never leave my side if not for something big. S-she probably can't defeat—Ah!"

In the middle of speaking, two vines sprouted on either side of Owen and twisted to wrap around him. His footing unstable, Owen soon found himself lying flat on the ground. Just when he was about to yell at West to cut the vines apart, one wrapped around his mouth, sealing off his voice. The only thing he could do was stare at West with wide eyes.

Looking at Owen lying on the ground unable to move or speak, West mumbled, "I'm starting to like that girl..."

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Gong Hua moved in the direction of the screams. Luckily, the exact spot of where the beasts were gathered wasn't too hard to find. He only had to go the opposite direction of where the soldiers were escaping.

Soon after, he spotted the towering, light blue figure of Nightclaw. The spirit beast wasn't participating in the killings; he merely sat crouched on the roof of a carriage. Nightclaw's six eyes turned rapidly in their sockets, his two tails dancing about constantly in the air.

After getting closer, Gong Hua stopped moving, for Nightclaw had stood up.

The spirit beast had already noticed Gong Hua.

One, two, all six of Nightclaw's eyes rolled to a rest on Gong Hua. Having caught sight of their savior, the soldiers who were still alive recklessly ran towards Gong Hua with a beast hot on their tails.

While running, the soldiers yelled at Gong Hua, "Save us!"

Seeing that the beast was about to pounce on them, Gong Hua lifted a hand, vines immediately pierced through the ground and sent the beast flying.

Panting, the soldiers ran to Gong Hua's side. After catching their breath, they looked back to see that their pursuer was gone. Still caught in the throes of fear, they struggled to speak, only managing to squeeze out a word of thanks after a long while. "Th-thank you!"

Gong Hua looked at them in surprise; it was the first time anyone other than Owen tried to speak with him in a long while. He couldn't help but remind them, "Run! This place is dangerous!" While speaking, he moved the vines around and saved various other soldiers who were about to be attacked.

Dread clouded the soldiers' faces. One of them spoke up, "B-but there are beasts everywhere..."

Gong Hua looked at them and instinctively knew that these soldiers wouldn't be able to outrun the beasts. He reached out with his hand, once again forming a web of vines that protected them. "Don't be afraid. Run! I'll hold them off."

Seeing that the beasts were blocked off by the web, the soldiers immediately ran for their lives.

The beasts became furious when they saw their meal running farther and farther away. But they were helpless against the web of vines. Some of the stronger beasts started tearing at the vines, but the minute they bit one apart, two grew in its place. It would take them ages to clear all the vines!

Although the one controlling these vines was standing right to the side, the beasts were keenly aware that Gong Hua wasn't someone they should provoke. None of the beasts dared to step up and attack Gong Hua.

*ROAR!*

The pack of beasts turned to look at Nightclaw, the latter's earsplitting roar shaking the earth in its magnitude. Afterwards, Nightclaw made his way towards Gong Hua with swift and graceful steps, his pack parting to make a path for him

"What is the reason for this?"

Nightclaw leapt right in front of Gong Hua. He had already recognized the other; there was only one Flower on this continent who wandered the land lost like him. It was the second time this Flower had come to obstruct him; Nightclaw was truly a bit angry. He growled lowly, "You are a Flower of the Leaf Tribe. Why do you interfere in my affairs and protect the humans time after time?"

"I'm here to kill you," Gong Hua replied straightforwardly.

Nightclaw stared at the other in shock. Battles between two physical spirits were rare, but that didn't mean they didn't occur. Most of the time, these kinds of battles occurred between beast-type spirits. A guardian spirit like the Flower was a physical spirit that never directly provoked others. Other physical spirits often avoided contact with them as well. Guardian spirits never left the land they protected, so inciting them on their own land was the stupidest move one could ever make!

But this Flower wasn't standing on his own land right now. His targets of protection also weren't the Leaf Tribe. And he had even willingly started a challenge. If Nightclaw hadn't seen the Flower's abilities before, he would never believe that the physical spirit in front of him was a Flower.

"Is there no other option?"

Gong Hua tilted his head and said, "If you leave right now and promise not to chase and kill these humans anymore, then we don't have to fight."

"I have not slaughtered any of these humans. I merely picked up the meat that was left on the ground. Is even this not allowed?" Nightclaw replied furiously.

Surprised, Gong Hua stared at him blankly. He asked sincerely, "You haven't kill any humans? But the beasts that follow you have killed many of them. Can you tell them to stop?"

"Nonsense!" Nightclaw laughed despite his fury. "Humans kill beasts and feast on their flesh. Are beasts not permitted to do the same and have their fill of

human flesh? Are we not permitted to clean up the fresh meat lying on the ground? Must we instead allow them to rot beyond the state of ingestion?"

Gong Hua paused after listening to Nightclaw's explanation. He felt there was reason to Nightclaw's words. Along the way, many of the soldiers had caught animals to eat. Of course, none of them were the type that killed and chased after humans. The soldiers mostly trapped and caught small animals that were frequently seen in forests. As it was like this, what was wrong with beasts killing and eating humans?

Gong Hua didn't know the answer to that question and decided to stop thinking about it altogether. He said stubbornly, "Leave, otherwise I'll kill you!"

Nightclaw responded angrily, "I am a spirit that chases after the stink of blood and carnage. I have neither the means nor the reasons of betraying that path! Flower, if you do not return to your correct path and insist on fighting alongside the humans, death will be the only end for you."

*Correct path...* Gong Hua said quietly, "I have been abandoned by the Leaf Tribe. They don't want me. I don't have any Leaves to protect. There is no correct path for me."

"How ridiculous! As you still exist, there must be a correct path for you. You are merely lost for the moment, but that does not mean the path is nonexistent."

Gong Hua didn't want to listen any longer. The Leaf Tribe wasn't around anymore, for him, the only person who was still beside him was Owen. Because of this, he would use everything in his power to protect Owen.

*Vines, attack.*

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## Chapter 8: Mila... The Promise of the Past and the Present

The only thing I want to do is kill you and take revenge for my family. I will kill you! *Ki*— No! Wait.

How can I kill you so simply?

You murdered so many people. You took away my parents. You took away my sister, her husband, and their child!

In the end, you killed my only remaining brother... Do you think your life would be enough for all of this?

How can it be enough to atone for all the crimes you've committed!

—Cas

"Nightclaw died?" Cas lifted an eyebrow, rather pleased at the news.

He hadn't heard the results of the battle, but Yin Qie Zi was standing in front of him alive and well and telling him the story. He naturally concluded that Nightclaw had lost the battle and died.

Yin Qie Zi shook his head and said, "He didn't die. Physical spirits won't die that easily. He did suffer some heavy injuries. When I was about to kill him, he begged me to spare his life. He was even willing to use jewels and treasures to barter for his life. In the end, I picked out this sword and gave it to Owen."

"You didn't kill that goddamn animal? Simply for a *sword*?" Cas growled angrily.

Yin Qie Zi paused in surprise. He didn't spare Nightclaw simply because of a sword. It was because the spirit beast had promised to leave with his pack and not chase after the army anymore. That was enough for him. It wasn't like he had no other choice but to kill Nightclaw.

Yin Qie Zi hadn't expected Cas to loathe Nightclaw this much. After thinking a bit, Yin Qie Zi decided that it was normal for Cas to have such strong feelings of hate for Nightclaw. After all, the spirit beast hadn't done anything worth praising when they first came across him. If Nightclaw had never appeared that day, they

might have led those happy and carefree lives for a bit longer...

Yin Qie Zi shook aside the weak thoughts and said, "The story is over. Isn't it about time for you to explain why you're here?"

Cas frowned and replied, "I would've forgotten if you hadn't reminded me. Why did you bother dueling with that Gawain earlier today?"

"I only wanted to see whether my shoulder has healed or not."

"Do you know what he's saying behind your back?" With a semblance of a smile, Cas recited ferociously, "He's only a commoner. How is he qualified to take the Warlord's daughter as his wife? Does he think he's become one of the aristocrat just because he's wearing some fancy clothes?"

After repeating Gawain's words, Cas looked over at Yin Qie Zi, waiting for the other's reaction.

Yin Qie Zi found the whole situation rather laughable. He replied, "Did you think I would be upset over something small like this? I'm not an ignorant little girl anymore."

"Humph! Of course I know that!" Despite saying so, Cas was still disappointed by Yin Qie Zi's lack of reaction. He asked crossly, "Do you know who that Gawain is?"

"Isn't he just Gawain?" Yin Qie Zi answered with that, but he knew Cas wasn't referring to Gawain's name, but his status. Gawain seemed to know Chris, he even called the latter uncle...

"He's Chris' nephew. Meaning he's one of the candidates to succeed the position of commander of the Xialan Spiritmancer Regiment," Cas explained simply.

Yin Qie Zi came to a realization after hearing that Gawain was "one of the candidates." Feeling a rising wave of disgust, he asked spitefully, "Is that why he wants to marry Mila? Instead of 'one of the candidates,' he wants to become 'the only candidate?'"

"Miss Mila's fiancé was Prince Edward. Nobody dared to vie for the same girl with the prince. After you appeared, however, everybody gradually learned that

the prince had no plans to marry Mila. If that wasn't the case, why would he allow some other man to hang around her all day long?"

Cas then added cheerfully, "The Paladin Clan isn't a small gold mine. After losing two sons, Warlord Paladin only has the twins left. It would be a profitable gain no matter which twin those greedy aristocrats get their hands on. You're going to experience all sorts of trouble in the future!"

*So Cas is excited to see how I'm going to suffer from this.* Yin Qie Zi didn't especially mind the troublesome news. In any case, his goal wasn't to marry Mila. There wasn't any need for him to think about something unrelated to his goal. It was enough for his plan if he could get closer to Mila in the next three months. It would be even better if Mila trusted him enough to leave Fenny aside. That would guarantee him success... in killing her!

Cas suddenly interrupted his thoughts and spoke, "That was a great expression just now. You looked as if you would go for the kill no matter who stood in front of you, even if it were the past Mila."

*Mila...* Yin Qie Zi felt a sudden ache in his heart. He growled, "Don't intentionally talk like that. You weren't like this before."

"Intentionally?" Cas broke into a flamboyant laugh. "I haven't 'intentionally' said anything. The only Cas you know is the ten-year-old Cas from back then. He was a kid who needed to be taken care of by his brother. Do you think I'm still the same as I was back then?"

"You aren't like this in front of the prince!"

Cas' expression froze at the other's retort. He said sardonically, "A dog has to act like a dog."

*Dog?* Yin Qie Zi stared at him blankly for a moment before asking, "So you really are working for the prince?"

"The king." Cas stretched lazily and said, "I'm lent out to the prince right now, to teach him how to use assassins. Though when he succeeds the throne, I really will become his dog."

At that moment, someone knocked on the door. Yin Qie Zi jumped in fright at the sudden noise. Just when he was about to tell Cas to leave, a voice sounded

outside the door: “Master, who are you talking to?”

It was Litelli. Yin Qie Zi felt his anger rising when he recognized the voice. He’d almost been frightened to death by his own servant!

“Master?” A curious expression appeared on Cas’ face. He then understood and asked confidently, “Is it the shorty from the Servile Spirits Tribe?”

“Yes.”

“He’s Lequilier, right?”

Yin Qie Zi glanced at Cas. He wasn’t too surprised that the other had found out about Litelli’s secret identity. The one who was most knowledgeable of his past was none other than Cas. It wasn’t unexpected for him to have guessed correctly.

Litelli continued knocking and yelling “Master” outside the door.

“Stop knocking! You can come in.”

Litelli stepped through the door and immediately froze. He’d never seen a stranger come looking for Yin Qie Zi before.

Cas sat on the bed and gave Litelli an once-over. Litelli, however, was covered from top to bottom by a cloak. Besides Litelli’s height, Cas couldn’t see any other distinguishing features. He taunted, “What’s the use of hiding under a cloak? You can’t hide your shortness from anyone.”

Only then did Litelli finally come out of the shock that Yin Qie Zi was meeting with a stranger. When he heard Cas call him short, he ripped off his cloak and puffed up his chest. He yelled, “I’m not short. I’m very tall!”

Cas took in Litelli’s appearance. The other was about 150 centimeters tall. Despite having a short and small stature, Litelli’s eyes were much bigger than average: they occupied at least a third of his face. Lifting an eyebrow, Cas stood up and walked over to Litelli. The top of Litelli’s head barely reached his chest. The other had to tilt his head back to be able to stare at him properly.

“In his tribe, Litelli is considered rather tall.” Yin Qie Zi’s lips quirked up in a smile. For once, he decided to help out Litelli and explain for him. “The average height for Servile Spirits is only around 130 centimeters. Most females barely

reach 120 centimeters. It's pretty rare to see Servile Spirits as tall as him. He could practically pass off as a short human."

"Exactly as I was saying!" Litelli nodded in satisfaction. When he lifted his head, he suddenly noticed the scar on Cas' left eye. He paused in surprise before letting out an earsplitting cry, "Y-you're the one who's here to take revenge... The one who injured Master last time!"

Yin Qie Zi immediately reminded quietly, "Litelli, lower your voice. Don't go around scaring people in the middle of the night."

"Master, w-why are you speaking alone with this dangerous fellow? What if he suddenly starts attacking you?"

Finally remembering that Cas was an enemy, Litelli took a step backwards and put himself in front of Yin Qie Zi, a cautious expression on his face as he prepared for battle.

Cas wanted to laugh when he saw a shorty like Litelli move into battle position. He then recalled that Litelli was actually the well-known Lequilier. Plus, Yin Qie Zi was also in the room. If they were to work together... Cas immediately pulled out his daggers.

Seeing this, Litelli reached inside the leather bag he had hanging around his waist. When he pulled his hands out, he had test tubes holding various liquids wedged between his fingers. The liquids came in all sorts of colors and seemed to be alive as they bubbled inside the test tubes struggling to get outside.

Watching those strange liquids dance inside the test tubes, Cas knew he couldn't let Litelli come out of this skirmish alive. His hands tightened on the handles of his daggers, ready to cut the other's neck at any moment.

*"Stop this!"*

Yin Qie Zi shouted, halting the other two in their tracks. He turned his head and growled at his servant, "Litelli, leave!"

Litelli started in fright. He cried, "How can I do that? If he attacks you—"

"Litelli! Put those medicines away!"

Seeing the severe expression on Yin Qie Zi's face, Litelli didn't dare disobey the

order. Even if he was known as a rebel within his tribe, he still couldn't disobey a serious command from a physical spirit. Litelli put away the test tubes, but still stood between Yin Qie Zi and Cas.

"Cas, put down your daggers!" Yin Qie Zi shouted, "Without an order from me, Litelli wouldn't attack you."

Cas put away his daggers without hesitating. It was best for him that things ended like this. He wasn't sure he'd be able to survive if he were to fight both Yin Qie Zi and Litelli with his strange medicines at the same time.

"Yin Qie Zi... Are you okay?"

Yin Qie Zi froze in shock and turned to look at the door. The voice seemed to have been Owen's. He immediately motioned at Cas to leave with his eyes. At the same time, he called out to Owen, "Nothing. My servant did something stupid. I was just scolding him."

Hearing this, Litelli stared unhappily at Yin Qie Zi with his big eyes. Yin Qie Zi ignored him as usual. Litelli could only stomp the floor silently in frustration.

Cas took two steps towards Yin Qie Zi and said quietly, "I'm actually here to tell you that there's no way to save the lives of those peace offerings. As for the one you'll take away, it'll probably survive."

Yin Qie Zi stared at him with wide eyes. Cas merely smirked and leapt out the open window.

"Yin Qie Zi, why don't we go eat breakfast? ...Yin Qie Zi?"

Instead of answering, Yin Qie Zi looked at the window, ruminating over Cas' words. His expression was ugly enough that Litelli didn't dare say anything rash like before. Owen continued calling Yin Qie Zi's name outside the door, his voice becoming more and more worried each time.

Cautiously, Litelli quietly reminded Yin Qie Zi, "Master, there's someone calling for you outside the door. Is it all right for you not to answer?"

Yin Qie Zi slowly drew his eyes away from the window. He yelled in the direction of the door, "Stop yelling. I was only changing my clothes. Do you have to yell like that? I'll be out in a moment."

He heard Owen go “Oh” outside the door, as if he had a sudden epiphany.

Yin Qie Zi turned away from the door and started changing. While doing so, he ordered, “Litelli, I want you to go to the palace right now as Lequilier and offer to be one of the king’s advisors!”

Litelli started in fright at the other’s command. Was Yin Qie Zi going to abandon him? He said quickly, “But I’ve already decided to serve you! You also agreed to let me serve you—”

Yin Qie Zi cut in and added, “This is a task I want you to do. I want you to go to the palace and learn whether or not Zhan Yan is leaning towards starting a war with Danya. I want to know which side is going to make the first move. Also... I want you to do all you can to protect those Leaves.”

Upon learning that it was an important task and that his goal was to protect the Leaves, Litelli immediately forgot his habit of adding unnecessary embellishments to his speech and responded, “No problem! Master, I’ll go prepare right now!”

Yin Qie Zi turned towards the window. Seeing that Cas was indeed gone, he went and opened the door. As expected, Owen was the one standing outside.

“What happened?”

Yin Qie Zi explained simply, “I was ordering my servant to go find some rare medical ingredients, but we had conflicting ideas.”

Unexpectedly, Owen didn’t probe any deeper into the matter. Instead he said quietly to Yin Qie Zi, “Father wants to see you after breakfast.”

Yin Qie Zi paused in his steps, both surprised and alarmed. “Wes... Warlord Paladin wants to see me? What for?”

“Promise me you won’t be angry when you hear...”

Yin Qie Zi directed a glare at Owen, the latter braced himself for disaster and explained, “Father seems to have something he wants you to do. It’s probably nothing more than wanting to test your skills. After all, Father treasures my sister deeply. He wouldn’t let her marry you that easily.”

“You make it out as if I’ve already decided to take your sister as my wife,” Yin

Qie Zi replied bad-temperedly.

Owen tensed at the other's answer. He asked, "Don't tell me you don't want to marry her?"

Yin Qie Zi was silent for a moment, not knowing how to reply. After thinking, he managed to force out an answer, "I haven't thought about that yet. After all, I haven't known her for long..."

Owen sighed in relief and said, "That's true." He then trailed off in thought. Considering Yin Qie Zi's personality, he must be somewhat interested in Mila as he didn't outrightly refuse the marriage.

Owen's mood lightened at that thought. It didn't matter what kind of tests his father came up with, he and Mila would help Yin Qie Zi pass them. If they really had no other option, they could get Edward to help. There wasn't anything they couldn't solve together. However, Yin Qie Zi's own desires were the most important. If he really didn't like Mila, then this marriage would be hard to pull off.

"Hahaha. My brother-in-law, which day—"

Yin Qie Zi glared at him ferociously.

"...I was just saying that Mila has been waiting for a long time. Let's quickly go eat breakfast."

After quietly changing what he was going to say, Owen found he probably wouldn't be happy that he was going to have a brother-in-law like Yin Qie Zi. He was already being bullied by his own sister. Now he was going to have to deal with a brother-in-law as well.

He could look past it if it were Mila doing the bullying. After all, she was his adorable little sister! But if he was going to be bullied by his brother-in-law as well, that'd really be... *Is there no god in this world?*

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Owen knocked on the door to the study. No matter the time or the situation, he was always a bit nervous to face his father. He wasn't like Mila who treated their father as someone to act spoiled with. Unlike him, Mila wasn't the slightest



bit afraid of their father.

Owen didn't dare act like that around their father. He didn't dare let any hint of weakness show in his expression, not to mention acting spoiled. If his father were to see it, he'd receive an immediate scolding and even physical punishment.

Yin Qie Zi glanced sideways at Owen. "What are you doing being more nervous than me?"

Owen forced a smile at Yin Qie Zi's remark. Quickly afterwards, they heard a "come in" from inside the study. Owen replied straightaway, "Yes!"

Yin Qie Zi was unused to seeing Owen's serious and proper expression. Mila had already told him that Owen lived under strict rules when it came to his father, so Yin Qie Zi wasn't especially surprised at the other's sudden change.

Owen opened the study's door with an apprehensive face. Seeing that his father wasn't alone in the room and that Chris was also inside, Owen stretched taut with even more tension. His expression became severe and his back ramrod straight, appearing like a model soldier.

On the other hand, Yin Qie Zi's expression was slightly unfriendly. He had to force himself to forget that West was the one sitting in front of him before he could put up an unperturbed front. Despite all his efforts, he barely managed to remain expressionless. Anyone who looked at him closely could tell he was being slightly hostile.

After walking in, Owen greeted the two men inside seriously. "Teacher, Father."

Chris nodded back at him, but West completely ignored his own son. West looked directly at Yin Qie Zi and asked, "I heard you're quite good at martial arts?"

Yin Qie Zi initially wanted to give a friendly reply, but ultimately found he couldn't accomplish such a thing. If not for the fact that West's grey-haired appearance was radically different from how he looked twenty years ago, Yin Qie Zi felt he wouldn't be able to resist pulling out his sword and attacking the other right then and there. In the end, he only replied blandly, "I'm about average."

West frowned at Yin Qie Zi's reply. His daughter had already told him that Yin Qie Zi had an indifferent personality and asked him to be tolerant of his behavior. But when did anyone dare act this indifferently towards a powerful Warlord like him? He couldn't help feel displeased at Yin Qie Zi's attitude.

Unexpectedly, Chris said, "You don't need to be modest. Although I was unprepared for your last strike yesterday, I feel I still would've lost to you if we truly fought to the end. Going by your age, calling you a genius wouldn't even be enough!"

Owen almost jumped in surprise when he heard Chris' reply. He knew Yin Qie Zi wasn't weak, but he never expected him to be strong enough that even his teacher wouldn't be able to defeat him. He then suddenly remembered that Yin Qie Zi was older than he looked. He was at least an "old man" over fifty years old. He might even be older than Chris. It wasn't strange for him to be that strong.

After hearing Chris' praise, West's mood lightened greatly. He was initially opposed when he learnt that his daughter had chosen a weak-bodied spirit binder as a potential husband. He was helpless against the choice as Mila had asked for the right to select her own husband for her birthday present. West agreed to it, but didn't expect the spirit binder his daughter selected to be this arrogant and obstinate. However, if Yin Qie Zi was someone who could fight hand to hand with Chris, then it was understandable for him to be arrogant.

"I have a task I want you to do."

"May I ask what it is?" Yin Qie Zi made an effort to be humble. His words were definitely more humble than before, but he couldn't change his tone of voice.

"I want you to protect the peace offerings Zhan Yan will be presenting to the Danyas."

Yin Qie Zi paused in shock. Cas had just told him that someone was after the lives of those Leaves. Now West was sending him to protect them. This kind of lucky coincidence made him slightly suspicious. He asked in mistrust, "You're really entrusting such a large task to me?"

Chris spoke up, "We haven't entrusted the job only to you. We merely want you to act as a guard for them. There have been many assassination attempts on the lives of those peace offerings. The prince is currently having difficulties

thinking of how he's going ensure their safety."

Yin Qie Zi was again reminded of Cas' warning when he heard "many assassination attempts." His heart thudded rapidly inside his chest, almost as if it were going to jump out at any moment.

"Father, Teacher, Yin Qie Zi has already agreed to make a few spirit medicines for the Danya emissaries. He can't guard those peace offerings for these two weeks," Owen explained hurriedly.

If Owen hadn't reminded him, Yin Qie Zi would've completely forgotten about his promise to Jin Qi Er. Despite that, it didn't pose much of a problem for him. If he didn't have time to make the spirit medicines, he could just leave them for Litelli to do. But this was difficult to say out loud, after all, Litelli was merely his servant in name.

West snorted at his son's reply and said sternly, "It's because the emissaries are waiting on your spirit medicines that they've decided to stay for another two weeks. If not you, who else am I going to entrust this guarding task to?"

Hearing his father's harsh tone, Owen didn't dare add anything else. He only turned his head and leveled a questioning gaze at Yin Qie Zi.

In order to avoid rousing West's suspicions, Yin Qie Zi said, "I will need my servant to come with me to the palace. I will also need a room to allow me to prepare the medicines. It would be best if the room is near the prison the Leaves are locked up in. I will do my best to protect the Leaves and make the medicines at the same time."

Seeing Yin Qie Zi's proactive attitude, West finally felt that the young man wasn't a bad match for his daughter. Yin Qie Zi was capable of making high-quality spirit medicines and was also a strong spiritmancer. He at least made a barely suitable match for Mila.

"Very well. You may leave for the palace after you make preparations." West then turned and directed an order at his son, "Owen, you will be the one to arrange the rooms he will stay in."

"Yes!" Owen replied quickly. He then added with a slight tremble, "Father, may I also participate in this mission? I feel I could be of some help."

West thought for a moment and responded, "It would be good for you to have some experience. Don't be a hindrance, understand?"

Owen immediately replied in agreement.

West waved his hand and said, "All right, you may leave now. I still have things to discuss with Commander Chris."

Chris turned and spoke to Yin Qie Zi, "Since you have a job to do, it won't be easy to seek battle advice from you anymore. If there is an opportunity in the future, we definitely have to compare notes!"

Yin Qie Zi nodded indifferently and left the study with Owen. Before the door closed, the two of them caught a snatch of the older men's murmurings inside the room:

"Exactly what is going on? Who's trying to assassinate the peace offerings?"

"I thought it was you..."

Owen perked his ears up as far as they could go and eavesdropped on the conversation. The door was shutting at a snail-pace rate, but in the end, it closed before they could hear anything else. Owen turned and whispered to Yin Qie Zi, "The one who said 'I thought it was you,' wasn't it Teacher Chris? D-does that mean my father wanted to kill the Leaves?"

Yin Qie Zi was pondering over the same question. He replied uncertainly, "He probably just suspects it was your father, but he doesn't seem very sure of it. Plus, your father already denied it with his earlier question."

"Then should he have admitted that he was the one who did it?" Owen added unhappily, "Unless Teacher Chris is an accomplice, my father would never admit to it."

That was true. Yin Qie Zi nodded and asked, "Do *you* think your father was the one who ordered the assassination of the Leaves?"

Owen scratched his face and replied, "I don't know. Even if he were the one behind it, I wouldn't be too surprised. Considering that he told the two of us to go protect the Leaves just now, it probably wasn't him. Or could that just be a diversion tactic?"

Yin Qie Zi didn't know how to continue after hearing Owen. He replied snappily, "How should I know if you don't even understand your father's way of thinking?"

"True. Let's just stop guessing. You should start packing. I'll go to the palace first and ask Edward about the situation. I'll also arrange a room for you while I'm there."

"You don't need to pack?"

"Yehv returned. He'll help me pack," Owen said. Then as if he'd just remembered something, he added, "What do you think about sharing the same room? It's easier to discuss things that way."

"No! I don't like living in the same room with another person. Plus, I need to use the room to make spirit medicines. I won't have room for you to sleep," Yin Qie Zi immediately replied in a chilly voice.

Owen scratched his nose at the other's response and nodded helplessly. "All right. It'll be fine if I live in the room next to yours, right?"

Yin Qie Zi nodded in agreement.

"If Mila knows you'll be living at the palace from now on, she'll surely be unhappy."

Thinking of Mila, Yin Qie Zi blurted out, "She can come over to the palace to look for m—us."

Owen rolled his eyes and said, "If Father ever catches wind that you're acting lovey-dovey with Mila while on a mission, he'll probably just pull you off the mission. Even worse, he might decide that you aren't worthy of her. Whatever the case, Mila can't come over to the palace frequently!"

"Is that so?" After knowing that he wouldn't be able to see Mila's smile or her sunflower-colored hair for a while, Yin Qie Zi suddenly felt a weight on his chest.

"Are you disappointed?" Owen said with a grin, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder! If you do well in the mission, then my father won't have any other objections to you becoming my brother-in-law!"

"Who's your brother-in-law!"

“Of course that depends on who’s marrying my sister!”

Owen regretted his remark the minute it left his mouth. If Yin Qie Zi denied the marriage, then things would turn out bad. What was he doing forcing the other into this sort of corner?

Unexpectedly, Yin Qie Zi didn’t say anything to deny Owen’s remark. Yin Qie Zi’s expression froze, but he remained silent. He then turned around and left abruptly.

“Wow...” Owen widened his eyes and stared after Yin Qie Zi. He said admiringly, “My sister is amazing! She managed to nab a difficult fellow like Yin Qie Zi in just a month! He’s going to end up as my brother-in-law any day now... Ah. That means my days of being bullied by both my sister and brother-in-law is just around the corner. *Ahhh—*”

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Yin Qie Zi pondered deeply on the situation on the way back to his room. When he opened the door he saw Litelli rummaging through the chests and drawers. Yin Qie Zi was surprised at the sight, but it seemed like Litelli was looking for something. After Litelli found it, he’d know what the other was looking for. He wouldn’t get an answer even if he asked Litelli right now; the latter’s favorite pastime was keeping others in suspense.

Yin Qie Zi sat down on the bed and continued wondering whether his new mission would be beneficial or detrimental to his revenge. Even after thinking, he couldn’t obtain an answer. What he did remember was that he should call off the order he had given to Litelli.

“Litelli, you don’t need to have an audience with the king as Lequilier anymore. You can come with me. We’ll be moving into the palace.”

Litelli almost coughed out blood at Yin Qie Zi’s words. He turned around and yelled, “Why didn’t you tell me earlier? I was going through great trouble looking for all that stuff!”

“Looking for what?” Yin Qie Zi looked at him confusedly.

“Clothes, weapons, and the high-quality medicines I’ve made before!” Litelli yelled desperately, “How can I go in unprepared if I’m to make the king believe

that I'm Lequillier? I spent that much time looking for everything, but then you tell me that I don't need any of it and can just accompany you... For what did I spend all that time looking for that stuff then? It's a complete waste of effort! A complete waste of time! Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

Yin Qie Zi's eardrums rattled with the force of Litelli's voice. He couldn't resist growling, "Stop yelling!"

Litelli closed his mouth, but a look of exasperation was still on his face. He stared at Yin Qie Zi with bulging eyes that appeared as big as fists.

"Don't stare at me like that. Warlord Paladin gave me a mission. I'm to go to the palace and protect the Leaves. So go and pack up all our luggage, or would you rather stay here and keep an eye on Mila?"

"Okay!" Litelli unhappily started cleaning up the mess in the room. While doing so, he grumbled, "Why did you have to make everything so difficult? We've already infiltrated the warlord's estate. Between the two of us, it wouldn't be too hard to kill the warlord. Why do we also have to kill his children? Moreover, you aren't even satisfied with one of them. No, we have to kill both of them. Now we got saddled with a mission from the enemy. What kind of a mess is this!"

Catching wind of Litelli's grumbling, Yin Qie Zi felt his thoughts tumbling around inside him. After leaving behind a "Call me when you're finished," he stepped outside the room. He didn't expect to see Mila just outside his door. She was accompanied by Fenny like usual, but Yin Qie Zi was already used to pretending that the maid wasn't there.

After meeting each other's eyes, both of them froze in their spots. One of them hadn't expected the other to be right outside his door; the other was hesitating over whether she should knock or not.

In their hesitation, Fenny said timely, "The flowering season for the Xialan flowers has just started! Miss Mila wants to go for a walk in the garden. Yin Qie Zi, would you like to come along?"

Yin Qie Zi nodded in response. He knew going for a walk was just an excuse; Mila had especially come looking for him. He walked up to Mila and took over the handles for her wheelchair. Following the excuse they'd made, he pushed her

towards the garden.

As the flowering season had just started, not many Xialan flowers were in bloom. Most of them were still pink flower buds. They swept their eyes over the swatches of pink that dotted the garden. Despite being buds, they weren't in any way inferior to the fully bloomed violet Xialan flowers. However, neither Yin Qie Zi nor Mila had the heart to admire the beautiful sight before them.

The two of them stepped onto the path that wound around the garden. Pink flower buds that were brimming with life surrounded them, but neither of them felt any cheeriness at the sight. Mila suddenly asked, "I heard from Owen that you'll be moving to the palace?"

"Yes, Warlord Paladin ordered me to protect the Leaves."

Mila replied quietly, "I'm sorry that my father forced you to do something like that. It's something that doesn't have anything to with you at all."

Mila was extremely worried. It was good news that her father was willing to test Yin Qie Zi; it meant he believed that Yin Qie Zi had the qualifications to become her husband. However, she knew Yin Qie Zi didn't like to be ordered around. She was afraid he'd be angry at this, so much that he'd leave and never come back.

Yin Qie Zi was silent, but then said in a low voice, "Actually, I'm quite happy to have the chance to go to the palace and protect the Leaves. Do you remember? I'm a Flower. Even if I don't want to save them, I don't want to hear news of their deaths."

Mila stared at him in a surprise. A slight smile finally graced her face afterwards. She really had forgotten that Yin Qie Zi was a Flower. She'd been worried that Yin Qie Zi would be angry at being ordered around by her father. She'd never expected the mission to have played exactly to his wishes.

"That's true. If it's like that, you don't have to worry anymore. You can protect them personally! However, remember to be careful, okay?" Mila urged anxiously, "Don't force yourself when things become dangerous! Your safety is the most important thing!"

Yin Qie Zi couldn't resist asking, "Does that mean you don't want me to



succeed in my mission? If that happens, then..." He suddenly clamped his mouth shut. No matter what, he couldn't possibly say something like: "If that happens, then I probably won't be able to marry you anymore."

Although Yin Qie Zi didn't finish his words, Mila had already guessed what he was going to say. She immediately blushed to the tips of her ears.

Despite her embarrassment, Mila couldn't calm the worry in her heart. She urged, "Yin Qie Zi, promise me you won't risk your life to protect those Leaves. Otherwise, even if I have to beg, I will have my father call off the mission."

Risk his life... Would he really risk his life to save those Leaves? No! The most important thing to him right now was revenge. He wouldn't bother with anything that threatened his revenge, even when it came to the Leaves!

"Okay," Yin Qie Zi readily agreed. "I definitely won't risk my life. You don't have to worry."

Even though she had obtained the answer she wanted, Mila suddenly felt strange. She didn't believe Yin Qie Zi was someone who would abandon the Leaves and not care about them. She even personally thought of him as a hero who would save the Leaves. However, this hero had just answered her request with a straightforward reply. This was strange no matter how she looked at it!

She turned to look at Yin Qie Zi and asked, "Exactly how do you see the Leaves?"

Yin Qie Zi gazed at her silently. He saw the initial curiosity in Mila's eyes gradually turn into uncertainty. Just when she was about to open her mouth to say something else, he swiftly cut in and said, "I don't know! You told me that they had a reason for abandoning me. Because I would lose my mind when the Spirit Tree died. They didn't have any choice but to abandon me."

In actuality, the Leaves had made the correct choice. If they had taken him along, then the boats they were riding in would've met the same aftermath as the town from back then. The only difference would be that one had sank into the ground while the other would sink into the bottom of the ocean.

After knowing the truth, he had no reason to hate the Leaves for abandoning him. Yet even knowing the Leaves hadn't done anything wrong, he couldn't find

it in himself to forgive them.

“Why did the Tree give birth me? What’s the point of leaving behind a Flower that would go insane once It died?” Yin Qie Zi asked self-deprecatingly.

He’d even imagined scenarios in which the Tree never gave birth to him. How many people would still be alive? Owen and Mila would never have died. Cas would never have lost his family or become an assassin.

“Yin Qie Zi, Yin Qie Zi—”

“I’m not Yin Qie Zi!” He cut in harshly.

Mila stared at him in surprise. She wasn’t the only one shocked at his answer, even Yin Qie Zi himself paled upon realizing what he’d said. He wasn’t worried that Mila had heard him, but Fenny was another question. He reflexively turned around and searched for Fenny. Unexpectedly, the maid was still standing by the entrance of the garden some 50 meters away from them.

Despite standing far away from each other, Yin Qie Zi’s harsh voice had raised Fenny’s attention. She stared pointedly at him and seemed to be planning to walk over. Mila, however, waved her hand in dismissal, only then did Fenny step back.

*She already feels it’s safe enough to stay that far away?* Yin Qie Zi was somewhat shocked at this new discovery. If Fenny was that far away, then there was no doubt he could successfully kill Mila.

“If you aren’t Yin Qie Zi, then who are you?”

Yin Qie Zi turned around, Mila was looking at him with her head raised. Her gold hair gleamed in the sunshine, almost blinding him with its light. Although she had asked him that question, not much curiosity could be seen in her expression. An easy smile graced Mila’s face and she spoke as if they were simply having a normal, everyday conversation. She didn’t seem to care whether he answered the question or not.

“Do you have another name? That would make sense. When you were a Flower, you probably didn’t go by your current name, right? Did you change your name to Yin Qie Zi?” Mila asked casually, but Yin Qie Zi saw through her act and knew she wanted to know the answer. She was merely doing her best to

suppress her curiosity.

Mila didn't want to force Yin Qie Zi to answer. She carefully maintained a casual expression and kept her eyes on the flower buds that surrounded them, as if she were appreciating their beauty. However, she couldn't resist sneaking an occasional glance at Yin Qie Zi. Her green eyes glittered with mirth, appearing like a child who was doing something naughty.

Yin Qie Zi couldn't resist a chuckle at her actions. He bent down and used Mila's wheelchair to hide himself. He said quietly to Mila, "Don't tell anyone else, okay?"

Mila didn't know what it was that she couldn't tell anyone else, but Yin Qie Zi was crouching beside her feet and looking up at her. Instead of his usual cold expression, he looked as if he were pleading with her... At that moment, Mila felt there wasn't anything she couldn't agree to when it came to Yin Qie Zi.

She nodded in promise, but Yin Qie Zi didn't react. Mila felt something was wrong and opened her mouth to speak. At that moment, Yin Qie Zi's head of silvery-purple hair started changing color at the ends. Into black!

At first, Mila didn't notice that the ends of Yin Qie Zi's hair was turning black. But as the black gradually climbed its way up to the roots of his hair, it was hard not to notice.

Mila stared at Yin Qie Zi in shock. He stared back at her with a somewhat shy expression. His inky black hair matched well with his snowy skin, but worry clouded his red eyes. Mila had a sudden urge to pull Yin Qie Zi into a hug and tell him that he had nothing to worry about.

Of course, she wouldn't really hug Yin Qie Zi. Putting aside whether it was an appropriate action for her or not, it was somewhat ridiculous for a wheelchair-bound girl to comfort a mighty spiritmancer and tell him he had nothing to worry about. But rather than a spiritmancer, Mila felt that Yin Qie Zi appeared more like a scared child at that moment.

"Black hair really suits you!" Mila couldn't resist adding, "Can I touch your hair?"

Yin Qie Zi hesitated for a second and a blush rose up on his cheeks. Mila's

request troubled him, but she'd said that his black hair was beautiful. As that made him slightly happy, he didn't want to reject her.

After arguing left and right with himself, Yin Qie Zi said quietly, "You can only touch it once! Just once!"

Hearing his childish response, Mila almost burst out into laughter. She immediately promised him, "All right, just once. I won't touch your hair any more than that."

Mila slowly reached out her hand. Yin Qie Zi lowered his head, practically burying his face into Mila's skirt.

*He can bury his face into a young lady's skirt but is embarrassed about someone touching his hair?* Mila couldn't refrain from smiling at that thought. She had already noticed long ago that Yin Qie Zi was sensitive about someone touching his hair, which was why she had especially asked him for permission. If he agreed to her request, then to her, it was proof that their relationship had moved another step further.

Like she promised, Mila only touched Yin Qie Zi's hair once. Her movement was especially soft, but she didn't remove her hand afterwards, instead she let it rest on Yin Qie Zi's head. She wasn't deliberately breaking her promise. She was merely surprised. After touching Yin Qie Zi's hair, Mila found that his hair wasn't like human hair at all. His hair was smooth and felt a bit wet, the hair strands were also a lot thicker than a human's.

Breaking out of her thoughts, Mila was about to remove her hand, but she noticed that Yin Qie Zi hadn't protested the whole time her hand was on his head. He was still leaning on her knees quietly. Although she can't see his expression, she noticed that the tips of his ears were red...

Seeing this, Mila suddenly had an inkling of how this was affecting him. She blushed at the realization, but still didn't remove her hand. She held it lightly on Yin Qie Zi's hair, afraid to let it move even an inch.

Mila then asked quietly, "Yin Qie Zi, will you tell me your real name one day?"

"...Okay. I will tell you one day."

Yin Qie Zi rested his head on Mila's knees, not letting her see his expression. He

didn't even know what kind of expression was on his face at the moment.

*Mila, I promise you, I will tell you my real name the day I kill you.*

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: dinoj, Sherry

# Chapter 9: Gong Hua... Abandoning the Flower, Abandoning the Leaves

Even your life isn't enough to atone for all the sins you've committed. Tell me Gong Hua, what should I do?  
Everyone's heading towards death anyways, but would your death be enough to offset this hatred of mine?  
Of course not! One measly life isn't enough!  
But you only have one life. After I kill you, it'll be gone.  
Even if I kill you, it won't be enough. And after you're dead, I won't have anyone to take revenge on...

—Cas

“Are you really not the one who wants to kill the peace offerings to start another war?”

Zhan · West · Paladin stood in front of the window in his study. When he heard the question, he turned around and said angrily, “Chris! Am I not the one who fought beside you in the war all those years ago? I know better than anyone, better than you, how tragic and devastating that war was! When Chakou fell, I was the one who led the remaining soldiers to escape. The Danyas weren't the only ones chasing us back then, Nightclaw and his pack were also following our trail. Can you even imagine the tragedies I've seen?”

Contrasting with West's anger, Chris calmly said , “Those things happened twenty years ago. People often forget to learn from past lessons.”

“There are some lessons you can never forget your entire life,” West replied coldly.

Looking at West's chilly expression, Chris didn't want to quarrel with him anymore. “I apologize. I simply can't think of anyone else who has the power to do something like this. Prince Edward isn't an incompetent prince. I'm afraid only a few people are capable of preventing him from searching out the truth of this matter.

Upon hearing Chris' apology, West calmed down. "You and I command two of the three spiritmancer regiments. There's also that guy, the one who has never experienced the disasters of war."

Chris paused and looked at West. He asked, "Do you mean the commander of the Qi Sheng Regiment, Andrew Xi Jiang? The Qi Sheng Regiment is mainly responsible for protecting the capital, Qifeng. Even if a war were to happen, Andrew Xi Jiang would never receive orders to lead his regiment onto the battlefield. He doesn't have any battle achievements at all... Perhaps he wants to utilize the war to weaken the power of Xialan and the Racing Flames?"

"That's probably not the case." West frowned and continued, "His sons are all in the military. One of them, Anselo, is a spiritmancer you've personally praised before. If a war doesn't happen, Anselo would never rise to the rank of Xi Jiang until his father dies. Not to mention, the process of obtaining a medal is strictly-regulated these days. Even if he's a War Marshal, he would never earn a higher title if he doesn't obtain any battle achievements."

*Doesn't the same apply to Owen?* Chris did not voice out the thought. It was for this reason that he suspected West of wanting to start a war. Without war, soldiers had no way of obtaining any achievements. Without achievements, rising to the military rank of Xi Jiang or obtaining a title higher than War Marshal was impossible.

Owen was in the same situation as Anselo: both could only wait until their fathers retired before they themselves could rise to the rank of Xi Jiang by becoming the new commanders of their respective regiments. However, even then, it'd still be impossible for them to receive titles higher than War Marshal.

Although West treated his son harshly on the outside, Chris understood how he really felt on the inside. West didn't love Owen any less than he loved Mila; he was only expressing his love in a different way.

West furrowed his brows and pondered the situation. "The Danyas are matchless in their swiftness and ferocity. Even though they don't have any spiritmancers or spirit charmers, their inherently strong physiques more than make up for that deficit. Their only weakness is their food shortages. However,

they live and subsist off of war. What they don't have they can obtain by plundering. But that isn't the biggest problem..."

"If another war starts between our two countries, would we be able to win again?" Chris murmured.

"We both know the answer to that question!" West continued a bit angrily, "No one knows better than us the real reason why the Danyas haven't started another war these twenty years! If they hadn't been scared out of their wits back then, why would those belligerent Danyas be willing to maintain peace for these twenty years!"

"The Danyas weren't the only ones scared out of their wits," Chris said simply. "I was also scared out of my wits."

If someone else had heard Chris, they definitely would have thought he was telling a joke. How could there have been anything that could've scared the calm and collected Commander Chris out of his wits?

However, West knew the man was telling the truth. He said seriously, "If another war starts, scaring the Danyas out of their wits again would be impossible as we don't have..."

West trailed off. He didn't know what words he should use to describe...her.

"Gong Hua." Chris finished the other's sentence and added, "Even if you're scared of her, don't avoid her name. The Danyas were so afraid of her power that they haven't invaded us for twenty years. They're terrified of coming across her again...her power was that dreadful."

"It's fortunate that they don't know we've lost Gong Hua," West replied, but felt something was off. "Are you regretting the fact that you agreed to her execution?"

"No!" Chris immediately shook his head and refuted the claim. "I never approved of using her powers back then. It's the same now. That sort of power shouldn't be controlled by anyone."

"If Owen hadn't brought Gong Hua before me, the entire Racing Flames would've been annihilated. The Xialan Regiment wouldn't have fared any better!" The Owen West mentioned obviously wasn't his son, but an old friend



who had already passed away.

Chris quieted when he heard West. He couldn't deny that if it hadn't been for Gong Hua, Zhan Yan might have fallen into Danya's hands... No, it would be more accurate to say that the entire continent of Xi Zong would have suffered devastating losses. The way the Danyas had been fighting back then, it didn't seem like they would have quietly returned home after defeating Zhan Yan.

Gong Hua had only slaughtered around ten thousand Danyas. For a continental war, that number wasn't enough to turn the war in Zhan Yan's favor. When the war had first started, the Racing Flames had lost sixty thousand soldiers. Compared to that, Gong Hua's ten thousand wasn't a large number at all. Despite that, the most important thing Gong Hua had done was plant the seed of fear in the Danyas' hearts.

For soldiers to march forward fearlessly and slaughter their enemies, their enemies had to be at least entities they could defeat, not an evil spirit who was cleaning up the battlefield like she was merely weeding the yard.

Even if Chris hadn't approved of using Gong Hua's powers, he had stayed silent when West had sent her onto the battlefield. In a way, that had been tacit approval. If Gong Hua were to be sent onto the battlefield, then thousands, or even tens of thousands of soldiers could be saved from dying. In war, that number was a lure that a general of an army couldn't ignore.

"I don't want another war, Chris. The fact that I'm in the pro-war faction is only a front for the public," West said quietly. "Even if Owen never obtains any battle achievements or receives any higher ranks or titles, at least that's better than sending him to die on the battlefield. The Danyas aren't easy opponents. Not to mention, Dashi and Yi Shuang lies to our west and north. Much of Dashi is covered with deserts, and Yi Shuang is permanently covered with snow. They covet the fertile Old Zhan Plains like an eagle eyeing a fat rabbit. Even if we manage to defeat the Danyas again, Dashi and Yi Shuang might decide to take advantage of the time we spend regrouping to invade."

"Whether we want another war or not, the final decision lies in His Majesty the King's hands," Chris replied solemnly. "If the king doesn't want a war, then I wouldn't fight back even if my opponent held his sword up to my neck. However,

if the king declares war, then as a soldier, it's my duty to become his sword and cut down his enemies!"

"Your stubborn views will attract you a horde of enemies!" West replied as he shook his head.

Chris smiled in response. "My duty is to become the king's sword. As for whether it's an appropriate time for war, that's your duty to explain to the king."

"Well, what an easy job you chose!" West said irritably. "If Andrew ever comes to challenge me, you better remember to mention that you're supporting me."

Chris smiled and said, "Why would that be a problem? Since when have I not supported you? If you really are pro-war, then I might hesitate a bit. But if you advocate for peace, then I won't hesitate at all."

West smiled back at the other, but couldn't help letting out a light sigh. The two of them were commanders of military regiments, yet if they had a choice, they'd rather not fight a war at all.

"Truly, it seems like the Danyas weren't the only ones who were scared out of their wits."

\*\*\*

Yin Qie Zi expressionlessly walked down the hallway of the royal palace. The people he passed by couldn't resist glancing back at him, but the real reason why they kept doing so had nothing to do with him. Before going to the palace, he had put on the extravagant outfit Owen had gifted him. At the palace, however, his outfit wasn't nearly extravagant enough, so that definitely wasn't the reason why he was attracting so much attention.

People kept glancing at Yin Qie Zi because those strolling alongside him were of exceedingly high status: Prince Edward, the only son of Warlord Paladin, and two others who had clamored to join them—Gawain and Anselo.

All of the most important, powerful, and predetermined successors of the country were gathered around him! It would be odd if they didn't attract any attention walking down the halls together. However, the one who drew the most eyes among them was still Yin Qie Zi, mainly because he wasn't a successor of the country. It was like someone had stuck a bun made of coarse grains amidst a

feast of delicacies, but the coarse bun turned out to be more eye-catching than any of the delicacies.

It was a frustrating matter.

Gawain made a point of frowning at Yin Qie Zi the whole way down the halls while carrying on a whispered conversation with Prince Edward. The onlookers didn't even have to think to figure out whom he was whispering about.

Yin Qie Zi's expression was as hostile as it could be. Gawain and Anselo frowned at his reaction, while Owen seemed surprised that Yin Qie Zi hadn't decided to turn around and leave. The spirit binder was definitely getting better at restraining himself.

Besides Yin Qie Zi, Edward was also making an unpleasant face, albeit inwardly. He'd been thoroughly occupied with the matter of assassins these past few days, but now these four were nosing in, wanting a piece of the fun by saying that they were going to protect the Leaves. Although they were all strong fighters, their families' influence was definitely stronger than their own personal strength. It'd be troublesome if something ended up happening to any one of them. So how could he actually send them to act as bodyguards for the Leaves?

Yin Qie Zi was probably the only person Edward could use out of the four. At least Yin Qie Zi wasn't an heir to an influential family; moreover, he was the strongest out of all of them. If something were to happen to Yin Qie Zi, however, Mila would probably have his head in return.

Though the other three couldn't be used as bodyguards, they could be used to scout out the movements of the powerful factions within the country. That was one reason why Edward hadn't outwardly refused to let them come along. The best way to learn everyone's intentions concerning the looming war was to use these loose-mouthed nobles who were in the know about everything.

Yin Qie Zi suddenly stopped and turned around to regard the others. He said coldly, "I want to go and pick out a Leaf alone. I won't trouble you all with following me anymore."

*So he's losing his temper after all?* Owen nodded to himself. This was how Yin Qie Zi should be!

“You—” Gawain’s expression froze. He had meant to criticize Yin Qie Zi’s rudeness, but he swallowed his words after glancing at the prince standing beside him. He didn’t want to become a target for criticism himself by yelling at someone in front of the prince.

Edward wasn’t all that surprised at Yin Qie Zi’s reaction. Although he had never seen the spirit binder lose his temper, he’d heard Owen complaining about Yin Qie Zi for a whole year. Because of that, he had thought of Yin Qie Zi as an odd person who was both unreasonable and bad tempered. After meeting Yin Qie Zi, however, he felt that the spirit binder wasn’t as unreasonable as Owen had made him out to be.

“Are you selecting a male or a female?” Anselo suddenly spoke up.

Yin Qie Zi turned to frown at Anselo. He didn’t really understand this person who only had a thoroughly average appearance. Prince Edward could be described as elegant, Owen as handsome, and even Gawain as cultured, but no praise could be used for Anselo. He definitely wasn’t ugly, just average. His eyes were constantly narrowed, as if he were smiling, but expressions rarely graced his face.

“Don’t tell me you plan on picking a female?” Gawain smiled and said, “That might not be good.”

“What’s not good about it?” Yin Qie Zi replied coldly. “Isn’t it even better to pick out a female and make Mila jealous?”

Gawain’s smile froze on his face. He hadn’t expected Yin Qie Zi to reply so bluntly, blunt enough that he couldn’t pretend this whole exchange hadn’t happened.

Owen immediately tried to smooth things over. “Gawain, this is just Yin Qie Zi’s personality! He’s made me speechless with anger many times already. Don’t mind him!”

Somewhat astonished, Anselo looked at him and asked, “You still want him to marry your sister even though he makes you angry?”

“...” Owen and Gawain wordlessly turned to stare at Anselo. They suddenly realized that this fellow’s ability to read the atmosphere was even worse than Yin

Qie Zi's.

"All right, all right!" Edward immediately smiled to defuse the situation. "In any case, the Danyas' desire to gift Yin Qie Zi with a Leaf has nothing to do with us. There's no reason for us to go and create trouble. Let's go to the drawing room and discuss how we'll protect the Leaves! Those assassins have had me racking my brains day and night these past few days. Now that I have all of you here as bodyguards, I finally feel lighter."

"Are you joking?" Anselo shook his head and asked, "How can you actually use us as bodyguards?"

"..."

Owen and Gawain stared blankly at Anselo. They weren't especially close to the latter. At most, they'd come across each other during formal banquets, but they'd never known that Anselo was the kind of person who blurted out anything on his mind. He didn't seem like someone from an aristocratic family at all.

Edward, however, wasn't all that surprised. He had gotten to know Anselo from an early age, so he was used to the rash things the latter often said. "It isn't as simple as being bodyguards. With you guys here, those assassins will have to think carefully about whether they can afford to clash with you over the peace offerings."

Anselo thought over Edward's words and nodded in agreement.

Edward turned to Owen and said, "Owen, why don't you take Yin Qie Zi to meet the Danya emissary first? Remember to come find us in the drawing room afterwards."

Owen shrugged and replied, "All right, I'll go over soon. Try not to discuss too many secrets while I'm not there!"

"Don't worry," Edward said. "We'll discuss plenty of secrets without you around."

Owen aimed a glare at Edward before calling to Yin Qie Zi. The two of them then headed towards their original destination.

"Who is Anselo?" Yin Qie Zi couldn't resist asking.

“He’s the son of the commander of the Qi Sheng Spiritmancer Regiment. He doesn’t like flaunting and you rarely get to see him in public. However, he and Edward are friends of a sort. It isn’t strange for him to come to the palace and inquire about the current situation, though I really doubt he would be able to pry anything out of Edward. There’s a much bigger chance that Edward would learn something from him instead!”

Yin Qie Zi hadn’t expected Anselo to come from such an outstanding background. Anselo wasn’t dressed extravagantly; in fact, his outfit was much simpler than Yin Qie Zi’s own. He glanced at Owen and snapped, “Can’t you aristocrats at least dress like aristocrats? Even your personalities don’t seem like ones aristocrats should possess!”

“Haha!” Owen said while laughing, “We all come from military families. Soldiers don’t have to live under those long, rigid rules of the aristocracy. You’re the one who seems more like an aristocrat.”

“...I’m not an aristocrat!”

“True.” Owen looked around left and right and said quietly, “You’re a Flower. Does that mean you’re the king of the Leaves?”

Yin Qie Zi paused for a bit and replied sharply, “Where are you going with your misunderstanding? The Flower isn’t the king of the Leaves. The king is called the Leaf Lord.”

“Is that so?” Owen scratched his face and added, “But the Leaves should listen to your orders, right? You’re their guardian spirit. In the end, your position might be higher than your king’s!”

“...I don’t know if they’ll listen to me or not.” Yin Qie Zi frowned and said, “Flowers would never give orders to the Leaves.”

“Huh? Then does that mean Flowers would listen to the Leaves’ commands? Does that mean... Are you somewhat like a general? Would you follow the orders of the Leaf Lord to protect the tribe?”

“No!” Yin Qie Zi explained brusquely, “Don’t even try to use human systems to explain the Flower’s existence. The Flower isn’t human, nor is it Leaf. The Flower is a physical spirit! It’s similar to the Spirit of War you all believe in. Would your

king command the Spirit of War? Would the Spirit of War command you?"

"The Spirit of War would never stand in front of me and speak to me. He doesn't really exist," Owen replied.

"That's because you humans don't really believe in His existence."

"What?" Owen stared at him in shock.

"Jin Qi Er's here. Be quiet."

Owen turned to look. A tall and strong Danya was walking towards them. Who else could it be but Jin Qi Er?

The Danya walked right up to them and asked without any words of greeting, "I heard you're joining the forces that will protect the Leaves?"

Yin Qie Zi didn't know what Jin Qi Er was worried about and explained simply, "Don't worry. No matter what happens, you'll have your medicine in two weeks."

Jin Qi Er frowned when he heard Yin Qie Zi's reply, but he wasn't in a position to say much more. He only emphasized somewhat roughly, "I hope you will uphold your promise."

Yin Qie Zi nodded without hesitation. He really did plan on keeping his promise. Even if Jin Qi Er didn't want to accept the medicine for some reason, he would still find a way to make the other take the medicine back with him to Danya.

"Then please follow me." Jin Qi Er motioned with his hand.

"Yin Qie Zi, you can go with him. I have to go look for Edward and the others," Owen said hurriedly.

Yin Qie Zi nodded in assent.

Owen turned around to leave but suddenly remembered something after a few steps. He immediately turned to yell, "Remember to let me see the Leaf after you choose one! Don't run off by yourself!"

Yin Qie Zi replied with an eye-roll. He then added tetchily, "I have to go look for Prince Edward afterwards and see how he's going to station the guards. How am I supposed to run off by myself?"

“That’s true!” Owen left, reassured by Yin Qie Zi’s reply.

Yin Qie Zi couldn’t help but shake his head. Owen was still concerned about which Leaf he was going to select. It seemed like Anselo wasn’t the only one unskilled at prying information out of other people. Owen probably delivered information free of charge to the prince all the time.

“Why are you here to protect the Leaves?” Jin Qi Er asked confusedly, before suggesting, “If possible, I can have one of my subordinates take your place.”

Yin Qie Zi shook his head and said, “You can’t do that. I’m being tested, for...” He hesitated, but continued, “For the hand of Warlord Paladin’s daughter.”

Jin Qi Er stared at him in surprise before understanding the reason behind Yin Qie Zi’s presence in the palace. He nodded, a faint smile appeared on his face. “So it’s for a woman. True, a man should fight for his woman by himself. Then I won’t probe anymore. I hope you will balance both of your tasks wisely.”

*Is he still worried?* Yin Qie Zi nodded his head impatiently.

Probably noticing that Yin Qie Zi was becoming impatient, Jin Qi Er ended the conversation and led Yin Qie Zi toward the prison where the Leaves were being held.

The prison wasn’t very far away; they arrived there merely after walking the stretch of the halls and making a turn.

Yin Qie Zi was surprised when he heard Jin Qi Er declare that they were there. This wasn’t the same prison as the one he had seen on the night he snuck into the palace. Their current location was a room right off to the left of the great hall. Although a dozen soldiers stood guard outside the room, it still didn’t make a great prison to keep people in.

“What’s wrong?”

Yin Qie Zi frowned and replied, “Nothing, I just expected them to be locked up in a prison.”

“They were kept in the prison before, but I had asked for a change of place,” Jin Qi Er explained. “There’s no reason to keep these Leaves locked up in a prison. They aren’t dangerous. Unless someone provoked them, they would



never make the first move and attack. Moreover, the prison environment was horrible. It wouldn't be good if they become sick."

"I see."

When they walked up to the door, Jin Qi Er greeted the guards stationed outside. A guard stepped up and opened the door for them. Besides an outer wooden door, an inner metal door also blocked the entrance. After both doors were opened for them, Jin Qi Er and Yin Qie Zi walked inside the room.

Once inside, Yin Qie Zi found his eyes drawn to the Leaves. Disregarding their lost expressions, Yin Qie Zi still found the Leaves less dazzling to the eyes than when they lived in the forests. Even so, he couldn't avert his eyes from the Leaves.

The room they were in was especially spacious with ten beds placed inside. Some of the Leaves sat on the beds, others stood near the windows. The windows weren't the normal ones with wooden frames and glass; instead, metal slats covered the openings. The Leaves were also bound by handcuffs and fetters around their wrists and ankles. The chains that linked their fetters together were short. Forget about running away, they had difficulty just moving around the room.

The Leaves didn't react much to their arrival; some didn't even bother to look at them.

Suddenly, a red-haired Leaf stood up and exclaimed, "It's you!"

*...Damn it!*

Yin Qie Zi recognized her as well. He had completely forgotten that one of the Leaves had seen him that night.

What was he going to do now?

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: Xuan, Sherry

# Chapter 10: Revenge... Is It You? Or Me?

Gong Hua, you have thousands of lives on your head. Your life is that valuable. How could I kill you so easily? If I did, I won't have anything left to take revenge on.

Therefore...

My dear baby Gong Hua, why don't you repay your sins through a life of suffering?

I'll hate you for the rest of my life and make you suffer for the rest of yours. But even then, this is barely enough for you to erase your sins.

*Hahahaha—*

—Cas

"You know her?" Jin Qi Er asked in surprise.

Yin Qie Zi's heart thumped rapidly. He immediately spoke to the red-haired Leaf in the Leaf language, "Don't say anything!"

He then turned around and explained to Jin Qi Er, "I apologize. I've kept this hidden from you, but I'm actually descended from the Leaves."

The Danya stared at him in shock, then said with suspicion, "No wonder why your hair color is so unique. So it is possible for humans and Leaves to have children together? It's impossible for us Danyas."

Hearing Jin Qi Er's response, Yin Qie Zi was at a loss on how to react. He glanced at the red-haired Leaf; she was staring at him, but kept her mouth closed tight to show that she wouldn't say anything rash. During that moment, another red-haired Leaf walked over to her and asked her what was going on in the Leaf language.

Seeing this, Yin Qie Zi turned to ask the Danya emissary, "Why do the Danyas like the Leaves so much? I wouldn't think that it is purely because you admire their beauty."

Jin Qi Er frowned but answered, "All right, I don't think there's any harm in telling you. It's because the Leaves are knowledgeable in plants and the powers

they have over spirits can increase harvest yields. My people are not well suited for farming. However, after having the Leaves with us, our harvests have become better than before.”

Yin Qie Zi chuckled. “The Leaves have such a power? Why haven’t I heard about this? There shouldn’t be that much of a difference in your harvests, right?”

“True, the difference isn’t great.” Jin Qi Er nodded in acknowledgement. “But with their guidance, our deficiencies in crop yields have decreased, which is of great help to us. My country suffers from severe shortages of food. If we were to miss two or three harvest seasons, I’m afraid we would have to rely on war and plunder other countries in order to survive.”

*So that’s why the Danyas have been quiet for all these years. I didn’t expect this to be the cause. After the Leaf Tribe migrated to a different continent, the Danyas have been openly capturing and buying Leaves to bring them to Xiasha. Because the Leaves decrease their chances of having a poor harvest, they naturally wouldn’t need to plunder humans.*

Yin Qie Zi nodded in understanding before putting forward a blunt request. “I want to have a good talk with them alone. Do you mind leaving?”

The Danya paused and asked hesitatingly, “You couldn’t possibly want to save them, right?”

“Don’t joke around,” Yin Qie Zi snapped. “If I had wanted to save them, I would’ve had Owen bring me here instead. I came here looking especially for you, and I even offered you the chance to stand guard outside the room. Should I also leave behind evidence for you so that you could label me as the criminal afterwards?”

After thinking a bit, even Jin Qi Er found his suspicion laughable. “I didn’t mean it that way. I apologize.”

“You don’t have to worry,” Yin Qie Zi said calmly. “Can I trouble you to leave now?”

The Danya nodded and left the room. Yin Qie Zi then turned around to face the Leaves. He looked around and noticed that every single Leaf had their eyes on

him.

He intentionally avoided looking over at the red-haired female Leaf and instead directed his words to all of the other Leaves present. “I’m here to select and take one of you away. I won’t treat you as a slave, but you will have to come along with me on my adventures. Why don’t you discuss amongst yourselves to see which one of you wants to come with me?”

The Leaves looked around at each other in dismay. The other red-haired Leaf walked forward and said with a faint smile, “My name is Hong Yan. The one behind me is Yan Er. What’s your name?”

Yin Qie Zi opened his mouth to answer, but suddenly remembered that the alias he was using belonged to the Leaf Lord. If he were to utter that name aloud, he’d be in great trouble.

“My name is irrelevant.”

“What do you mean irrelevant?” Yan Er suddenly jumped out and yelled, “Your name represents everything you are. How can you call it irrelevant?”

Yin Qie Zi looked at Yan Er; she appeared to be the liveliest of all the Leaves gathered here. At that moment, Yin Qie Zi felt as though he had been transported to the past. For years, he had watched the lively Leaves walk past the Tree in high-spirits. Just simply looking at them, he had been able to feel some of their joy rubbing off on him.

Yan Er felt uncomfortable pinned by Yin Qie Zi’s unnerving stare and quickly hid behind Hong Yan. The latter looked at his sister and said, “I’ve never heard that humans and Leaves could have offspring together. You shouldn’t be a mixed descendant of human and Leaf, right?”

Yin Qie Zi was still gazing at Yan Er with a smile on his face. Hong Yan stared intensely at him, wanting to find traces of Yin Qie Zi’s supposed mixed heritage. He traced over the other’s red eyes, they seemed so familiar... *Red eyes!*

Hong Yan paused in shock and inspected the other’s face more closely. He couldn’t find any semblance of the proclaimed mixed heritage, but those pair of eyes and that face were becoming more and more familiar to him. Only Yin Qie Zi’s silvery-purple hair appeared off, but something like hair color wasn’t difficult

to change!

“Y-you—”

Hong Yan stared dumbly at Yin Qie Zi’s face before speaking in an inconceivable voice, “...Flower?”

Yin Qie Zi froze in shock. After processing Hong Yan’s words, his expression flipped.

*Slam!*

“I heard you were here.”

The door crashed open and Cas walked through. “Have you picked one out yet? Are you going to go with a male or a female? From what I can guess, you would probably choose the one who would make the best spirit charmer—”

Cas drifted off when he noticed the ugly expression on Yin Qie Zi’s face.

Seeing the door was open, Yin Qie Zi abruptly turned around and ran outside, even pushing aside Cas who was blocking his way.

“What the hell?” Cas frowned, then snarled ferociously at the Leaves, “I don’t care what had happened just now, but none of you are allowed to breathe a word of it to anyone else. Otherwise, you’ll be wishing for death once I’m done with you!”

After leaving behind a warning, Cas chased after Yin Qie Zi. Luckily, the latter hadn’t gotten too far away. Within a few steps, Cas managed to catch up to the spirit binder. He grabbed Yin Qie Zi’s wrist and stopped him in his tracks. However, Yin Qie Zi struggled and managed to break free of Cas’ hold, turning around to run off again.

“Stop running!” Cas spoke in a furious voice, “Do you think this is your backyard? If you really have a death wish, then continue your rampage through the palace!”

Yin Qie Zi froze, but kept his head down. He mumbled, “He recognized me as the Flower. He really recognized me.”

Cas’ expression stiffened when he heard Yin Qie Zi. He grabbed the other’s wrist and dragged him into a nearby room. After closing the door, he faced Yin

Qie Zi and yelled, “Are you crazy? Do you think the royal palace is some type of secret hideout? I can’t believe you actually said that in the halls! If you’re really wishing for death so badly, then tell me! I’ll kill you right now!”

Yin Qie Zi stared distractedly into space and didn’t seem to have heard Cas.

“You good-for-nothing!” Cas frowned and asked, “Would the Leaves use this to threaten you to rescue them?”

Yin Qie Zi paused, and said dumbly, “Threaten me? How would that be possible? The Leaves would never threaten anyone.”

“Then that’s the end of that.” Cas snorted and continued, “And here I was under the impression that I would have to kill you now so that someone else doesn’t get to you first! As long as those Leaves never open their mouths, what’s the harm in letting them know about you?”

Yie Qie Zi turned to look at Cas, but couldn’t bring himself to reveal anything. For him, letting the Leaves know his real identity was worse than being killed. If the Leaves knew that he was their Guardian Flower, then they would also know that he, their guardian...had abandoned them.

“I think you’re just making things hard on yourself. You should have sent someone from the Paladin household to help you select one, but you came over by yourself and ended up being recognized by the Leaves. How could you be anything besides an idiot?”

“I only wanted to talk with them a bit...” Yin Qie Zi replied quietly.

“Would it make you happy to talk with them?” Cas’ lips lifted in a cruel smirk and he said viciously, “That’s not allowed! Don’t forget that I’m not going to let you experience any bit of happiness for the rest of your life!”

“I don’t want to anymore,” Yin Qie Zi said simply. “I don’t want to see them anymore.”

The second those words left his mouth, Yin Qie Zi knew he was in for trouble. Wasn’t Cas’ favorite pastime forcing him into doing the things he didn’t want to do?

As expected, Cas immediately ordered, “Go pick out a Leaf right now.”

Yin Qie Zi stayed silent, but then surprisingly nodded. "All right."

After replying, Yin Qie Zi swiftly turned around and started walking toward the room where the Leaves were being kept in.

In shock, Cas stared after Yin Qie Zi for a moment before catching up to the other. He kept a suspicious gaze on the spirit binder. Yin Qie Zi's response was a tad bit more straightforward than he liked. However, after thinking for a bit, Cas concluded that it was probably because Yin Qie Zi understood that he had no way to refuse and decided to forgo the needless struggle.

This was starting to become interesting.

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Yin Qie Zi slammed the door open forcefully. The Leaves inside the room lifted their heads and turned to look at him. Unlike their previous lost expressions, a glimmer of hope now decorated their faces. Hong Yan and Yan Er immediately walked up to him.

"Don't look at me with that sort of expression!"

Yin Qie Zi continued with a snarl, "Did you think I would rescue you? Stop dreaming!"

The Leaves stared at him in shock. But rather than saying they were dismayed by Yin Qie Zi's words, it would be more accurate to say that they were scared of the Flower's attitude... They had never seen a Flower roar at someone before.

Even Cas was surprised at Yin Qie Zi's sudden outburst after following the latter into the room. He quickly turned around and shut the door tightly. If Yin Qie Zi continued yelling with the door open, Cas was afraid that every guard standing outside would end up learning about the "Flower."

Yin Qie Zi eyed every single Leaf inside the room and said through gritted teeth, "The Leaves were the ones who abandoned me! Remember?"

Hearing him say this, the Leaves' expressions changed.

"All of you walked by me day after day, yet none of you took the effort to pay me any attention. I sat alone under the Tree all that time! Your laughter rang in my ears constantly, yet I was forced to turn a blind eye and eat all by my



lonesome!”

Yin Qie Zi stared at each and every Leaf inside the room. He was waiting... Waiting for one of them to voice out the reason why they had abandoned him: that he would go crazy after the Tree died! That he would kill them all during that period of insanity! That no one had the courage to talk to a Flower who was on the verge of starting a massacre!

Silence permeated the room. Yan Er swallowed forcefully and looked at Yin Qie Zi with tears and pity in her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Hong Yan began with thick regret in his voice.

*Damn it!*

“I would go crazy. Did you all know that from early on?” Seeing the Leaves nod, Yin Qie Zi continued coldly, “Then why didn’t you kill me before leaving?”

“*Kill you?*” Hong Yan repeated in alarm. “How could we do something like that? You are our Flower!”

“Did you never think that I would kill people once I started going insane?” Yin Qie Zi roared at him with fury and agitation.

“Kill...people?” For a long time, Hong Yan couldn’t speak out of shock. Finally, he said, “No! We never had that thought. It’s a part of the Flower’s natural instinct to return to the Tree’s side. There wouldn’t be anyone around the dying Tree. The Flower wo-would...become insane along with the Tree and die afterwards.”

In other words, he was a Flower that should have died but had failed to for some reason?

“Flower, did you kill?” Yan Er asked in a small voice.

Yin Qie Zi chuckled when he heard the question. Quietly, he said, “I’ve killed plenty. I’m...a Flower that grew up bathed in blood.”

While the Leaves stared at him with widened eyes in shock and distress, Yin Qie Zi said to Cas, “I’ll pick this red-haired female Leaf.”

He then left without turning back.

The two of them walked down the halls one after another. Yin Qie Zi's steps were fast and precise; Cas almost had to jog to catch up.

"Stop! What the hell were you thinking just now?"

Cas grabbed hold of Yin Qie Zi and grounded him to a halt. Cas was alarmed; no matter how much he thought about it, something didn't seem right. The Gong Hua he knew never acted like this. Even if Gong Hua was just acting as Yin Qie Zi right now, he would have never roared and cursed at the Leaves just because they had abandoned him in the past. Because of this, Cas couldn't help but suspiciously wonder what the other was planning.

Even though he had been caught in a hold, Yin Qie Zi didn't turn to face Cas. He merely said quietly, "Revenge."

Cas jolted in surprise before he growled in complete disbelief, "Revenge? Did you believe you were cursing at the Warlord Paladin just now? Don't lie to me!" He said in a warning tone, "Give me a clear explanation!"

Yin Qie Zi turned around and said sternly, "Did you think Owen and Mila's only enemy was West? West had nothing to do with Mila's death!"

Cas paused in shock before noticing that Yin Qie Zi's face was covered with tears.

"Owen and Mila's biggest enemy...was me!"

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: Xuan, PiKairi

# Character Introductions & Afterword

## Character Introductions

Indigo: One of the Danji Yate's Four Colors. The one responsible for leading the Danyas' attack against the humans.

Aquamarine: A blue-haired female Leaf. Indigo's lover.

Jin Qi Er: An emissary from Danya. Seems to be friends with Indigo.

Zhan · Chris · Wollier: Commander of Zhan Yan's Xialan Spiritmancer Regiment.

Zhan · Gawain · Yves: Chris' nephew. One of the candidates in line to become the next commander of the Xialan Spiritmancer Regiment.

Zhan · Andrew · Dinadan: Commander of Zhan Yan's Qi Sheng Spiritmancer Regiment.

Zhan · Anselo · Dinadan: Andrew's son.

Yan Er: A red-haired female Leaf.

Hong Yan: A red-haired male Leaf.

## Afterword

This volume was a pain to write!

I had to advance the plot while writing about the past and foreshadowing the future at the same time... Hahahaha! In the end, I still didn't manage to finish writing about what had happened in the past. 囧!

I still haven't finished writing about the onset of Gong Hua's hatred and what happened afterwards. I hope everyone will wait for the next volume with a heart full of curiosity (or complaints)!

I'll mention here that the next volume will be called "Choice."

As the name implies, there will be many choices to be made. Gong Hua always says that he doesn't have a choice, but now he will finally have the leeway to make a choice himself. However, it'd be difficult to say whether it would be considered good or bad if you had the chance to decide something.

In this volume, I tried writing about military matters and war. It didn't take up too many chapters, mainly because I didn't dare write too much. After all,

military matters are one of my weak points. If I had to write about the specifics of war chapter after chapter, I think my brain would turn into a goopy mess. That is why it's best to take it slowly.

I also tried writing about love. While going through reader comments after volume one's release, it seemed like everyone had mistakenly assumed that the romance is between Gong Hua and Cas. However, I believe that this misunderstanding has been resolved after reading volume two, right?

I suddenly have no idea what else I want to add to the afterword. There are a lot of unfinished plotlines, but I can't mention any of them here!

All right, let's talk about the cover instead. The upside-down Cas on the cover is so handsome! The background is also detailed and beautiful! Monto, I love you!

To be honest, Cas' upside-down position is rather marvelous. But what's more marvelous is that...it totally suits his style! He's exactly the type of deranged fellow who would strike such a mysterious pose.

How shall I comment on this?

Cas, nicely done! That upside-down position is so striking! It'll make girls scream for you!

I'll mention right now that one of the things Cas hates the most is when someone acts more deranged than him. (Therefore, as the author, I am the person he hates the most).

Is it okay for me, the author, to be this happy in the afterword after writing such a tragic book? What if someone tells me that the afterword ended up ruining the originally serious novel that is filled with sorrow?

I should delete every word in the afterword and rewrite the whole thing... No, I'm normally this happy in every afterword I write. If I'm not happy, then someone might as well cut me apart and allow me to reincarnate.

What? Are you asking me for the reason why the author is capable of being this happy after writing such a tragic novel?

...Well, you should try writing a novel, and only after two long, arduous months

manage to hand in the finished manuscript. You'd be hopping mad with joy, I'll tell you right now!

That is why I'm always so happy in every afterword. I'll only be serious and emotional after writing the last chapter of a series. As there would be no subsequent volume, my happiness would always be dyed with a bit of melancholy.

Unfortunately for all the readers, this series is far from being finished. Therefore, I am very happy. I'll ask everyone here to be tolerant of an author like me who's more deranged than Cas, who had his entire family killed when he was young. Please don't cut me apart and force me to reincarnate!

Off topic, I'll be writing the seventh volume of *The Legend of the Sun Knight* after this. To be honest, I'm rather looking forward to writing it because it has a lot of [spoilers]. I've been waiting to write it for a long time now. I'll finally have my wish fulfilled and can play around to my heart's content.

To everyone who's reading *The Legend of the Sun Knight*, please look forward to all my schemes! (Blush).

Yu Wo

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Translator: Nannyn

Proofreaders: Xuan, Sherry